



**Chris Parsons**

Ambassador of the Loomba Foundation

# CYCLING FOR WIDOWS

To Empower Widows  
in the Union Territory  
of Jammu & Kashmir

Mr. Chris Parsons is an ambassador of the Loomba Foundation, who cycled the entire length of India from Kanyakumari in the South to Jammu in the North to raise funds for the Loomba Foundation.

He started cycling on Monday 3rd February 2020 and reached Jammu on 14th March 2020, after cycling 4100km in 41 days through Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir.

The Loomba Foundation will use all funds raised by Mr. Chris Parsons to provide skills training to impoverished widows in India.



**THE LOOMBA FOUNDATION**

*Caring for widows around the world*



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## Foreword by Lord Loomba CBE

**I had the good fortune of meeting Chris Parsons at a function in 2010. He was planning a charity bicycle ride, which I found interesting, so I told him about the Loomba Foundation and the issues faced by widows.**

I have thought of that fated meeting many times as it was the start of a long and special relationship. To date Chris has taken on three very demanding challenges that many of us would never even contemplate. He is certainly a unique individual for whom I have tremendous admiration and respect.

In 2011, Chris partnered with the Loomba Foundation and cycled from London to Gibraltar raising \$200,000. In 2015, upon celebrating 30 years at his law firm, Herbert Smith Freehills, he came up with the slightly crazy idea of walking 30 marathons in 30 days from Mumbai to Bangalore, India, covering 1,260km. He successfully achieved this amazing feat raising \$300,000 which supported 5,000 widows for an empowerment project in the constituency of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, Varanasi in India.

In 2019 I received a phone call from Chris to

discuss his next fundraising idea. He wanted to cycle from the southernmost Indian city of Kanyakumari to Kashmir, almost in the foothills of the Himalayas. Coincidentally, I was planning to launch a widow's empowerment project in India and so this fundraising was ideal. Chris was going to cycle 4,500km over 45 days with the view to raising \$450,000. It was certainly an outstanding adventure and journey, which we have tried to capture in this book.

Chris's collaboration with the Loomba Foundation shows his inherent understanding of the issues widows face due to cultural practices and deeply rooted traditions, especially in developing countries. The plight of widows is particularly acute in South Asia and many countries throughout Africa. War-torn countries and conflicts around the world contribute to the issue. India has 46 million widows, more than any other country in the world, of which 19 million are in rural India. They most often live in poverty due to lack of education and they are unable to work due to stigma. Hence, they often have no income or means to survive. On the loss of her husband a woman loses her place in society, is ostracised by her own family and community,

is shunned and left destitute in poverty. Her plight is worsened by superstitions branding her evil or a bad omen in mainstream society. A widow loses her rights to land and inheritance as greedy family members disinherit her, taking advantage of her illiteracy. Sometimes these widows are fed or treated worse than dogs by their in laws.

The pension scheme that was introduced in 2009 by the central government of India, the Indra Gandhi National Widows Pension Scheme was a landmark moment and safeguarded some widows from complete neglect and destitution by the family. It allowed widows to earn respect and bargaining power where the family only valued her pension contribution. Unfortunately, widows are subjected to these exploitations, disinherited, abandoned, starved, abused, raped and mentally tortured. They have no recourse and very little help. Many widows flock to Varanasi and Vrindavan, holy cities, to find shelter, pray in temples, and they receive one meal a day. Deplorably these poor widows do not even get their burial rights because no one will pay.

I witnessed how widows are treated first hand, when my father died in 1954. I was

only 10 years old and my mother had to immediately conform. She was told to remove her jewellery and only wear white clothes from that day forth. She was also characterised as a bad omen by the priest at my wedding who would not let her sit near me or my wife to be, at the time of the marriage rituals.



This hurt me immensely and was inconceivable as my mother would only bring me blessings of good fortune. This injustice towards her throughout her life had a profound effect on me and was the driving force behind setting up the Loomba Foundation in honour of her memory. My wife and I, in 1997, set up the Loomba Foundation in the UK along with sister charities in India and the USA. It was the

first global charity which was committed to empowering widows and to educate their children globally.

The core work of the Loomba Foundation is in India; however, we have empowered widows in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal in South Asia; Syria in the middle east; Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Rwanda, Malawi across Africa; Guatemala and Chile in South America. Various partnerships were formed in these countries with other charities such as Richard Branson's Virgin Unite and Youth Business International, a Prince of Wales project.

Our work covers three main areas: advocacy, widow empowerment and educating the children of widows. We launch programmes to empower widows to gain skills such as sewing, call centre training, travel and tourism to earn a living and become independent. Initially we centred around educating the children of poor widows, an important and vital part of the process, which is still being done today.

For advocacy we carry out activities to create awareness publishing research highlighting the extent of issues around the

world. On 23rd of June 2005 we launched an awareness day, International Widows Day. This was followed by a campaign that lasted five years to gain recognition by the United Nations (UN). It was a long process, however, in 2010 we succeeded in convincing the UN to adopt this date as a day of awareness which is observed every year. This was critical in creating more awareness for the plight of widows and it has a special significance in my heart as 23rd June was when my father passed away and my mother became a widow.

Unquestionably, Chris, is very much a part of the history of the Loomba Foundation as he is an extraordinary human being and a kind, generous person. Due to his remarkable qualities Chris is a very driven and an outstandingly successful lawyer. I feel honoured to have met Chris that auspicious day and proud to have him on board as an Ambassador for the charity. It is hard to express how I feel about Chris, a person who has sacrificed so much for a cause that I feel so passionate about and is close to my heart.

Thank you, Chris, for some wonderful memories; for being a brilliant fundraiser and a great friend.



## Chris Parsons

Chris Parsons is a lawyer who works for Herbert Smith Freehills and Chairman of the India Practice. He is also an ambassador for the Loomba Foundation, a charity that campaigns for the rights of widows around the world.

Over the years Chris has raised money numerous times to support and improve the lives of widows and in 2020 he decided to take on another challenge. This time he wanted to cycle 4,500km, from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, over 45 days with a fundraising target of \$450,000.

In preparation, Chris trained for over a year while also travelling to and from India every month as part of his work as a lawyer. This book charts his incredible story and is taken from his blog which he wrote every day during his cycling. While Chris had an

experienced team to support him, he was alone in dealing with the physical and mental part of the challenge. Also, 2020 will be remembered for many years to come as the date that coronavirus swept around the world. In fact, the pandemic was forcing some countries to lockdown to protect their citizens just as Chris was nearing the end of his journey.

To find out what happened during his incredible journey please read this book and we hope you enjoy his adventure as much as we did.

# Say a Prayer for Me

I could see 2020 coming up, and thought it had a nice ring to it. My last one was in 2015, five years ago, and I thought: Why not? I chose India because it's my second home and I wanted to support widows and their children again. I chose to cycle because I walked and ran last time. I've done cycling before for the Loomba Foundation, when I did the London to Gibraltar cycle ride, and I thought, why not?

**Why I'm fundraising for widows** You know, the cause of widows is something that, through Lord Loomba's descriptions and things that I have read of the challenges they face, and the fact that they are often thought to be the reason for their husband's death, seems to me like a really important cause. The way they are treated, the lack of support that they receive from their families and the community means that they seem to me to be a really important group of people that need special support. Having already suffered one great loss to be suffering another one, along with their children, I hoped I could do something to help.

**My training** I bought myself a Peloton bike, which I'm on fairly regularly. It is a sort of spin (stationary) bike that I use at home. The weather in the UK has turned more unpredictable so I've been doing a lot of training rides on my Peloton training bike indoors. I'm using their brilliant indoor bike and training app and you can do live online classes with world-class fitness instructors from your home, which is great fun. When I'm not travelling for work, I'm doing that pretty much once a day for an hour. It's really hard and sweaty work – but I feel like I'm

making good progress. I've been doing rides of 35km to 50km at a time.

**Please say a prayer for me...** While I am looking forward to the cycling I do have some concerns about the route. My biggest worry is that it is going to be a big physical challenge. Based on my 30 Walking Marathons in 30 days the mental challenge will be even bigger. I worry about getting ill and maybe even heatstroke but the one thing I am really anxious about is the traffic on Indian roads. I've been to India many times so I know what the roads are like and I saw some statistics that stated that India accounts for 11% of road deaths globally in spite of only having a 2% share of cars on the road. Therefore I'm hoping that everyone will pray for me for 45 days from Monday 3rd February onwards!

**Safety was the priority when planning the route** HV Kumar helped me plan the route as he is an expert when it comes to the roads in India. He also helped me plan the route for my 30 Marathons in 30 Days. I left the planning to him and he has been a star! He was looking for a route that would provide the greatest amount of safety for

me so it won't be the most scenic route.

The roads I will be using will be fairly major roads. A lot of them will have barriers dividing the road so they will be like dual carriageways which HV Kumar thinks will be safer. Being a cyclist means there are more dangers than being in a car. For starters there is less chance of someone driving the wrong way which does happen! I will still have to contend with drivers who don't see me as well as any that are tired or using their mobile phones. I will therefore need to keep my wits about me.

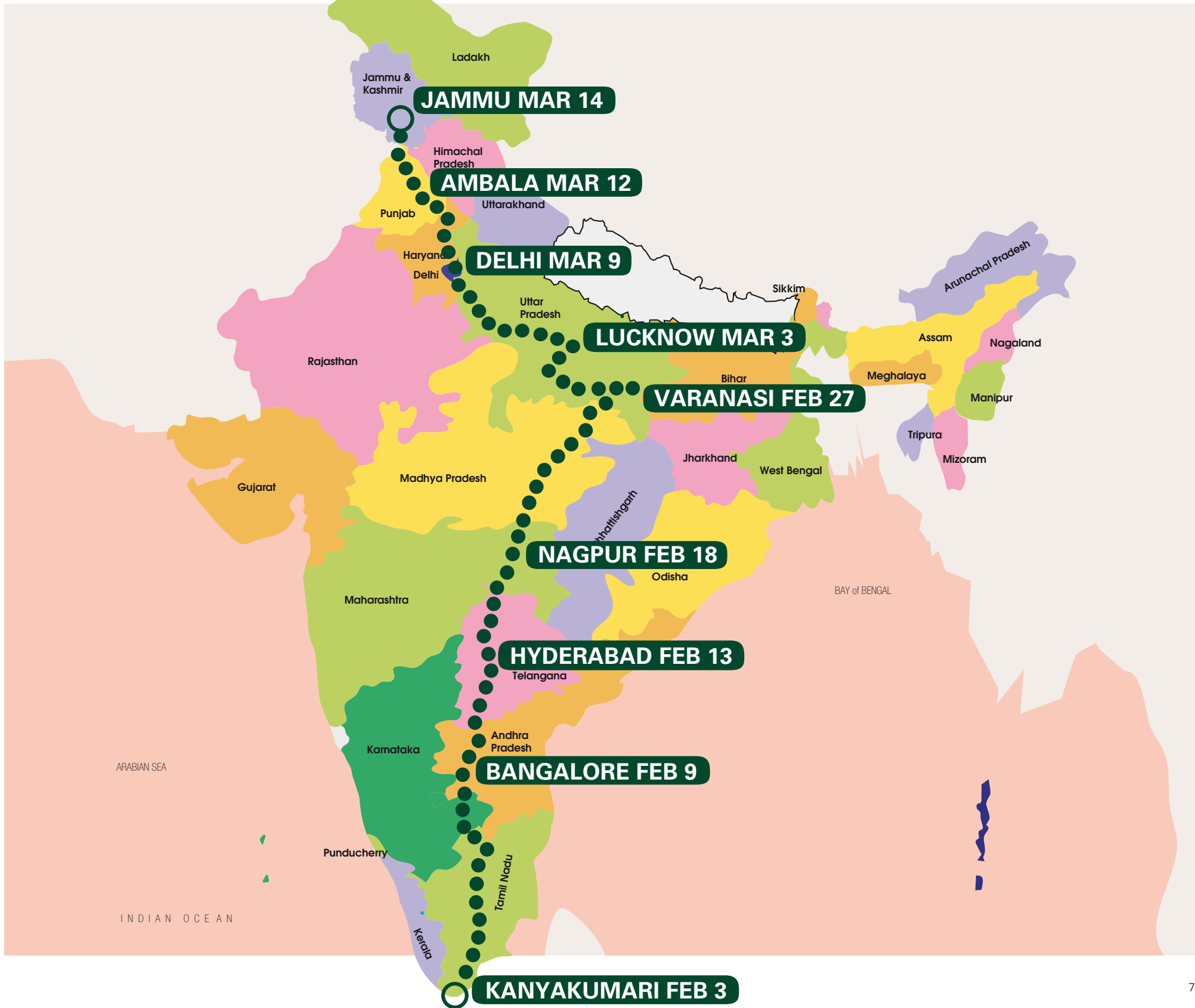
I'm looking forward to the challenge and it should be hilly towards the end of the route when I approach Kashmir. If I manage to get that far I will be unbelievably fit so I can probably cycle up walls which I hope will not be my famous last words!

**A lovely reception the day before I start cycling** We had a lovely reception kindly hosted by Professor Raj Kumar from the Jindal Global Law School. There were lots of local dignitaries from the local area, business people, politicians and members of the civic community. I have to say it all

feels a bit surreal at the moment. I have been congratulated by a lot of people but I haven't achieved anything. I have had lots of photos taken but even then, I haven't achieved anything. I'm less anxious than I was yesterday and I'm excited about starting the cycling.

**A few issues the night before** I had a few issues. Firstly, the cycling (clip-in) shoes that Atul and Sachin picked up for me from Bangalore do not fit me as they are size 7 and I'm size 8. Miraculously I brought my own shoes and we can swap the other shoes when we get to Bangalore. The other issue is I left my Garmin charger in the Taj Lands End hotel in Mumbai. I was really worried as my Garmin watch will track my distance and it will run out of battery soon. But another fantastic bit of luck is that Sachin has exactly the same watch and therefore has a charger.

We'll be up about 6am tomorrow and we will take the car to the southernmost tip of Kanyakumari overlooking the sea. I will then set off at 7am for my first 100km day. Please pray for me on the Indian roads as I'm going to be hot and sweaty.



# Day 1

Monday 3 February

## Route details

From Kanyakumari  
To Sankarnagar  
Distance 100km  
Time 4 hours 41 minutes

## Indraneil Ghosh

Great start Chris! Well done. I remember the feel of cycling on the national highways during college days – the highway has its own sound and personality, which is very different from the state highways and other city roads. I loved the experience – but it was hard work especially climbing flyovers. Drafting behind passing lorries (trucks) was fun though!

## James Stockdale

Great stuff, Chris! Great photos and blog that enables us all to be part of your brilliant adventure. Ride safely.

## David and Holly Jones

Great first day Chris – hope your legs are working well for your second. We're loving the sights and sounds of India from drizzly Devon and cheering you on!

## Clive

Glad you're off to a good start!

## Damien Roberts

Atul and Sachin aren't the only ones shocked to know you've doubled your longest ride on Day 1, Chris! Your legs will no doubt adjust, but the saddle sores might not...

# The First Day is Out of the Way!

I've completed my first 100km day which is fantastic. It's brilliant to finally get going after a long build up and a year of training. It's great to be on the bike and its very different cycling out on the road as for the last three months I've been using my Peloton indoor training bike.

**I have a great team!** The team is brilliant as Atul and Sachin are complete superstars. The two drivers, Abdul and Mahadev, are great so it's pleasing to have a good strong team behind me so I can concentrate on cycling.

## Lovely sunrise to start my first day

The start this morning at sunrise from Kanyakumari was amazing. The roads are great and I was cycling along NH 44 (National Highway 44) the whole way.

There was a windfarm for the first 20 or so kilometres and the wind was blowing in my face so it was tough having to contend with a headwind. The weather has been kind and the roads have been reasonably flat.

We finished around 4.30pm local time and

then we drove to another hotel arranged by Oyo Rooms. We are staying at the Royal King's Palace in Sankarnagar.

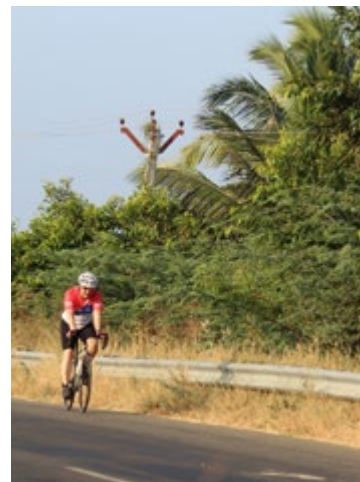
**Free lunch and painful physio!** We went to a restaurant for lunch and the owners gave us free food as they were struck by the cause of widows which was brilliant. Sachin has been giving me regular physio just as he did last time (for Walking for Widows in 2015) and it is just as painful as last time.

As I'm cycling outside as opposed to using the indoor bike there's much more pressure on my arms, pecs, wrists and its meant that my right hand has gone a bit numb. I'm sure Sachin will sort that out this evening. Sachin is going to give me another physio session in a minute and then we will go out to eat.

**I nearly fell off my bike!** I nearly fell off the bike once as there was some gravel on the road which I need to look out for. It's difficult if there's gravel and there's a lorry behind me. I can't pull out so I just had to cycle carefully through the gravel. That was my only worry today.

I drank lots of chai which is important to me. I had lots of dates and nuts to keep me going. No code reds so far which has been a surprise. A code red involves going to the toilet and I'll leave the rest to your imagination!

**The guys are shocked!** The longest I've cycled on my bike, when I was training, is 50km. Atul and Sachin were both horrified when I told them. I hope I don't live to regret that I didn't cycle a longer distance.





# Day 2

Tuesday 4 February

## Route details

From Sankarnagar  
To Madurai  
Distance 200km  
Time 4 hours 46 minutes

## A Puncture and a Sore Bottom!

I've completed my second day and it feels like a real day of cycling compared to yesterday. It just felt like the real thing.

**Ouch, I'm really sore!** My bottom is properly sore. The inside of both cheeks are bruised. I'm not sure there is any way around this issue other than waiting for my bottom to get hard again. I'm just hoping it won't blister and turn into an open sore as that would be serious. I might have to take some time off for it to heal so I will need to wait and see.

There's been a slight change of plan as we have gone to Madurai because of a nicer Oyo hotel. Oyo recommended coming here instead of our planned route. We are going to do a loop tomorrow because it took us an hour and a half to drive here this evening so we're running much later than we expected. I finished my 100km and we jumped in the car but we got lost so that took an hour and a half. Otherwise it's been a good day.

**Sachin is a superstar** Sachin (the physio) has been extraordinary. I have forgotten how amazing he is (we were together when I last fundraised in India) as he is giving me six to seven sessions a day. He is also advising us on our diet. Sometimes that is driving Atul mad as he is trying to control him too much. And he is also the bike doctor as he is sorting out my bike too. He is just incredibly diligent and thorough.

Each session of physio is not short, it goes on for some time. It doesn't feel as painful as last time but I'm not going to tell him. It's painful but I was in agony a lot more last time. Whether I have got used to it I'm not sure. He has been a complete superstar.

Sachin is going to be with me for the whole 45 days. Atul is here for two weeks and then he will be replaced by Pawan (from the Loomba Foundation) and then Atul will return for the final two weeks.

**I completely lost control of my bike** I nearly fell off my bike as I had the puncture. The tyre went flat very quickly but luckily I was going uphill rather than downhill because I completely lost control of the bike. I'm really pleased I brought my own cycling shoes because the cycle shop sent me a US size 8 rather than a UK size 8 as they are not the same size. A US 8 is a UK 7 so they are too tight to wear.

**Inside overtaking** The roads are great and the traffic isn't too bad. Everyone seems to overtake on the inside which is a bit worrying. The concern I have is when there is a bus on the outside and a bus overtakes on the inside! Once today we had a car undertaking a bus so we had a bus, another bus and a car on the hard shoulder and luckily it just missed me. For the most part I feel safe on the roads.

**Terrain and weather** My son is asking about the conditions. The roads so far have been pretty flat. There's been some elevation today up and down but nothing serious.

The road conditions are really good for cycling. The weather is around 30 degrees. It gets hot in the afternoon but not too bad. I've been putting sunblock on. The main

challenge I've had is the headwinds which is a bit of pain rather than a tailwind. I would much prefer it the other way as I could probably cycle 50% faster.

**Bottom update!** The doctor, or Sachin in other words, had a look at my bottom. The right side is bruised but the skin has broken on the left side. He is going to dress it and treat it with some antiseptic. I will then need to add some cream, chamois butter cream, so that I don't get even worse blisters. I will not be sharing any pictures of my bottom. I'm going to have my physio session now and then I'm off to bed.



### **Mitasha Chandok**

Chris – so fantastic to read all your updates. Stay safe on those roads and hopefully you will hit some cooler weather soon!

### **Roddy**

Chris, sorry about the sore bottom. Eventful day but now all seems very real compared to about 4 years ago when you told me you we're contemplating this. Head down, chin up, enjoy the wonderful landscape and people. God's speed!

### **Steve**

Plenty of chamois cream and redo it during the day... fingers crossed it's better tomorrow. Well done that man.

### **Damien Roberts**

Chris, it feels so easy watching from the comfort of my office, but I know its not. Plenty of days to go (and enjoy) – take them one at a time. And although even Sean Kelly once famously retired whilst leading a multi-day race due to saddle sores....I have every confidence that you're a tougher man than him!

### **Alan**

Well done Chris! Really inspiring to see you finally on your way and your blogs are such a treat. Make sure you apply the chamois regularly, change bike positions every now and then (on and off the drops and out of the saddle). We are all with you!

### **Seamus**

I've heard of high bottoms and low bottoms, but sore bottom sounds like the pits. Most likely it will toughen up with use.

### **Siew Boon Lou**

I feel your pain! It's excruciating. Lots of cream and mini breaks, clean dressings, all of which I'm sure you and Sachin are doing. I'm sure you won't let this stop you from continuing and achieving your goal. All the best. Keep us posted.

# Day 3

Wednesday 5 February

## Route details

From Madurai

To Madurai

Distance 300km

Time 4 hours 29 minutes

# A Stand Up Cycling Day

Day 3 is completed and it was hot today but lovely going down the quiet country lanes. We're staying in Madurai again because like when I did the 30 marathons we've ended up doing a loop. Madurai is famous for textiles and also for temples. The really famous temple is called Madurai Meenakshi.

**My most painful day yet!** The most terrible thing happened today as in the most painful. It involved ripping off the dressing from my bottom. Ripping it from the left and right cheek left me in absolute agony. Sachin thinks that the external stuff is not as bad as the internal stuff. Its all quite bruised internally and it's very very painful.

I had to stand up to cycle for large parts of today because it's too painful to sit down. The problem is that I trained on a Peloton (indoor) bike because of the winter and now I'm on a road bike and the saddle is very hard. I just have to get used to it and cope as best as I can. I told Sachin that the good news is I can focus on this while not worrying about other matters.

**Meeting Pati & the family** On my route today I met Pati which is the name of the old lady and it means grandma. She had a stove and the fuel for it was dried

cow dung, which they burn. I am also posing with her grand daughter and great granddaughter.

**Lovely Tamil food** We've been eating lovely Tamil food like coconut, yams, idli, rava dosa, kothu paratha and various dips like mint chutney & red chilli chutney. We've had lots of coconut stuff like grated coconut with vegetables. In Madurai I had a lemon tea that Atul made.

**Atul's birthday** It's Atul's birthday today so we celebrated together. It is incredibly kind of Atul and his wife Samiksha and his son Akshaj to let him spend this special day with us.

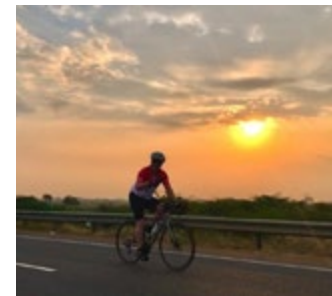
Atul is going to a very famous Hindu temple tomorrow called Rameshwaram. He is going in the morning and will return in the evening. Therefore I will be with Sachin and one driver tomorrow.

## A thousand handstrokes is just pure bliss

The best thing ever is Sachin giving me a sports massage every three days. It involves a technique called a thousand handstrokes where he rubs his hands gently down my back. It put me to sleep as it was absolutely wonderful.

**Thank you RM Cycles** I want to give a big shout out to RM Cycles which is my local cycle shop in Tenterden in Kent. We did a WhatsApp video with Georgia, Kam and Tom as we needed help with our spare bike as the gears were slipping. If I have a problem with my bike I can swap over to the spare bike so RM Cycles were great and so was Sachin as he was able to fix the issue.

**The Times of India** A Times of India reporter came to see me today in my room for an interview.





#### Damien

Chris – I went for a 25km ride last night to share some “moral support” for your great effort – and despite it being only a quarter of your daily grind (and in a local park rather than the hot highways of India), I got off feeling like I my cheeks were somehow already sharing half of your pain! May the discomfort slowly subside to allow you to think more about the great work you’re doing. Read you tomorrow.

#### Paula Hodges

Winded when I read the first part of your blog, but you will have thighs of steel if you keep cycling standing up! And thanks for the description about the temple and all the photos and videos – hope the amazing journey helps to distract you from the pain!

#### Helen Munn

Hello Chris from your friends at MQ! It’s very entertaining and inspiring to read your blog and see the photos from our incredible expedition. However, it’s making it harder for Emily and I to grumble about aching legs after a morning HIIT class... You’ll have to explain to us the rationale behind the loop route?! Good luck for the next couple of days, you’re doing brilliantly and we’re super proud. Helen x

#### Prutha vyas

Hi. I am Prutha from Self Employed Women Association (SEWA). I am working there since last 20 years. We have a collaboration with the Loomba Foundation. We conduct the skills training for widows with the Loomba Foundation. I got the info of your journey from Atul. I am reading your blog every day. I heartily appreciate your matchless effort for widows. It’s thrilling for me to read your blog. I pray for your successful journey. Good job. Keep it up... Take care. Keep in through blog. Regards.

#### Prof. Dr.K. Chockalingam

Dear Chris and dear Atul. My wife and our close relatives who all attended the Cycling for Widows launching programme ask me every day about the health of Chris and his progress in reaching the target. After seeing your daily blogs, I update them. We are sad that you faced some health problems but your spirit is very high. We wish you all the best.

# Day 4

Thursday 6 February

## Route details

From Madurai

To Trichy

Distance 400km

Time 4 hours 26 minutes

# Making Breakfast and Dinner

Another day completed. The day was hot, very hot. It is well into the 30s centigrade so I'm sweating a lot but I'm keeping well hydrated with lots of electrolytes.

**Making dosas for breakfast** Breakfast was fun because the owner of the restaurant allowed me to make some dosa, plain dosa. There was a big pot of it next to the wood burning stove and its rice paste which had been ground. The paste is then poured into the hot plate and the cup is used to make the circle. Frankly, mine was a bit of a disaster compared with his beautiful ones. Funnily enough we had to eat mine and he served it to Sachin. Sachin kindly ate it and we had to pay for it too.

**The rural lanes were a bit too rural!** We went down some back lanes a few times today which was nice to get away from the monotony of the big highway lanes. There are rural roads and there are rural roads! The roads I took were a dirt track with rocks so it was a bit of a challenge to cycle on. I suggested to Sachin that we don't go down such rugged roads.

**Lunchtime naps** People are sometimes a little suspicious when we explain what I'm doing. When I ask them for a place to sleep after lunch they wonder what we're up to and whether we have inappropriate thoughts. So they are a bit suspicious until they understand what we're doing. We didn't have a room today but I was able to sleep under some trees on a day bed.

**Did you hear my screams?** My bottom is pretty much the same but the good news is that I'm using the drop handlebars on my road bicycle which is moving me a

millimetre or more forward. This is taking a bit of pressure off my left butt cheek which is definitely helping. So I'm in less agony today. Sachin is working on my upper body as I'm not used to being over hunched so much when using the drop handlebars.

Sachin thought it would be a good idea to get the dressing and tape off my bottom sooner rather than later. Rather than waiting to get my Oyo Hotel room Sachin said he would rip it off. Frankly I'm surprised people couldn't hear me in London, Singapore or even elsewhere. As my boys know I'm not very good with pain and I was screaming and screaming as the hairs were being ripped out of my bottom.

**Sachin and Abdul to the rescue** We went out to eat before going to the hotel. We were waiting to eat so long Sachin got frustrated so he started cooking. He is making chapatis and Abdul is cooking them. The two guys from the establishment were doing something else.

**Will I survive Sachin's regime?** To my surprise and more to my horror Sachin has decided that I not only need to stretch in the morning but I also need to do 15 minutes of hard exercise. So planks, press ups, squat thrusts, lunges, sprints, etc. He wants to strengthen me and my core for the cycling. He wants me to think that cycling is just part of the exercise in the day. I was about to get in the mug and bucket shower and he has messaged me asking if I can do some

exercise. So I've agreed to do it and I will definitely be quite fit by the time I get back to London, assuming I survive his regime.

**Median nerve entrapment** I made an error saying in a previous blog that the physio sessions weren't as painful as last time in 2015 as I spoke too soon. I have been in a lot of pain with some of the stretches and nerve exercises. The median nerve in particular which runs from the neck all the way through underneath the shoulder, through the armpit down the arm into the fingers. The fingers in my right hand are getting quite numb from the pressure of my hands on the handlebars. So he is doing some pretty extreme stretches trying to release the pressure and that's not a pretty sight.

**I love you Deb** A special mention to my wife Deb. Not only is she putting up with the fact that I'm not there to help she has also broken her wrist on her right hand. She is right handed so she is coping with one hand. My son Ed who joined me for the last four marathons in 2015 has managed to dislocate his thumb playing rugby and he's also right handed so he can't use his right hand very much. Debs is supporting him but she's had some very bad news as a close friend has passed away. Love to you Deb.

**Atul's day trip to the temple** Atul wasn't with us today as he left at 6am in the morning to visit a temple and let me explain the significance of this trip. As a Hindu he wants to visit the Char Dham which is a set of four

pilgrimage sites in India as it's considered good fortune if achieved during a person's lifetime. With the visit to Rameswaram temple he has now visited two sites. He has already visited Puri and the other two sites are Dwaraka and Badrinath. Rameswaram is situated on the south eastern coast of India in Tamil Nadu and is the nearest point to Sri Lanka.

Atul said a prayer in the sea and also entered the temple to pray. He told me that he prayed to God so I could successfully complete the journey without any issues. He also asked for good health and prosperity for everyone including his family. Thank you very much Atul.

**Yesterday's loop** Yesterday's loop was to do

with the accommodation that Oyo Rooms is kindly providing me with. They wanted to make sure I got a good hotel and it just made sense for me to go back to Madurai rather than going further on and not being somewhere adequate.

Today we were able to catch up on our route through a combination of taking a slightly more direct route to my next accommodation and travelling in the car for a bit after I completed my 100km. We have made sure that I am still cycling the whole length of India and the route in total is 4,500km. I will definitely cycle 4,500km even if it involves a few loops.

I hope I answered your question Helen and if anyone has any questions please ask in the

comments and I'll do my best to provide an answer.

**Thank you Jose and Kritika** A big shout out to Jose for being a star and making sense of the stuff that we send through for the blog. I just send a few notes via Whatsapp through voice messages and Jose does a super job of making sense of it all and pulling together photos to make it all hang together well.

I also want to thank Kritika Venugopal who is one of our star associates working in our Singapore office. She is very kindly managing the Cycling for Widows Instagram account. She has been diligently posting material which has got some traction. Thank you Kritika, I really appreciate it.



### Roddy

First week almost done Chris: well done. Loved the cooking story and makes a welcome respite from bottom stories. Keep strong and go well.

### David and Holly Jones

Off the beaten track looks like much more interesting cycling but probably not as quick. If we'd known you were going to do your own cooking, David would have come and done it for you! Loving the blogs and best wishes for your first Friday. David and Holly. x

### Clive

It's always nice to wake up to a report on your bottom, Chris! You might try lifting the saddle a bit as well as riding on the drops; I guess you're not using the saddle from your UK bike so some of the issues might be getting used to it and the new one not being in the same position as you are used to.

It's said that the old guys used to shove steak down their trousers to ride on (and eat in the evening nice and tenderised) but that might upset people in India eh? Try tweaking the height of handlebars to help your nerve and numb hands – might have too much weight on arms. You'll be fine by day 45! Too frosty to cycle here – actually a bit dicey driving this morning on untreated roads!!

### Damien

Chris – being a mountain biker myself it's great to see you getting off the highways a bit. Certainly an excellent way to see some (more) of the country that means so much to you. And if not too late... switching to a MTB now might just save you from destroying some of those steaks Clive has prescribed! With you all the way.

# Day 5

Friday 7 February

## Route details

From Trichy

To Salem

Distance 500km

Time 4 hours 18 minutes

### Alastair Henderson

Really enjoying the blog, Chris (from the comfort of my sofa!). Challenges a-plenty, but it wouldn't be so memorable if it was all plain sailing (cycling), would it. You are a wonderful example to all of us. All the best, and let's hope the scar tissue forms fast!

### David and Holly

That doesn't sound like such a great day Chris except for the uplifting bottom news. That's been keeping us up at night so we'll sleep easier knowing it's on the mend. Better luck for the weekend hopefully.

### Damien

Sounds like the ride (and the whole experience) is only just beginning in earnest now, Chris. Your blog helps us understand a little of what you and the team must be going through, and allows us to experience a little of the amazing story that is unfolding one pedal stroke at a time – so thanks so much for making the effort each day to share it with us.

And I'm not surprised that you're not really enjoying the riding yet. It sounds tough. Really tough. But I'm sure that you will come to enjoy it – both the riding itself, but more importantly the work you and your whole team over there are doing. Right behind you.

# Trainers and Cleats Don't Mix

Day 5 done 500km down, 4,000km to go which is great. The route today was different from all the other days as for probably 90km of the route were on much smaller roads. It was more challenging as the traffic was much heavier and we were going through towns and cars, bikes, buses, trucks, cows, dogs, chickens and turkeys. Everything was jumping out in front of me so I had to dodge them.

**I'm not enjoying the cycling yet!** So it's been a very different day of cycling. I did think as I was going along whether I'm enjoying it and the reality is, if I'm completely truthful, I'm not. I'm in pain as my bottom hurts so much in addition to everything else that's going on. There are clearly moments of joy with amazing things going on and I love finishing but I'm not completely enjoying the cycling yet. I hope that changes as time goes on. I'm sure it will.

### Trainers and bicycle cleats do not mix

The big problem today was we got up this morning and we realised my cycle shoes weren't in the car. We left them on the road 50km away in a different direction from the hotel. It was a challenge as I had to cycle with my trainers on. Over the last 20 years or probably the last 30 years I've only ever cycled with cycle shoes and cleats so it was difficult. I had to wear my trainers on top of the special cycle pedals, which are only suitable for cleats, so my foot was slipping off. The first 20-30km were really difficult and my mood was down again so that was the big challenge of the day.

### Atul's emergency round trip to Bangalore

We originally thought that Atul and Mahadev could go to find the shoes at the side of the road but we changed our minds as the chances of them being there was next to zero. We then decided that Atul and Mahadev would drive 275km to Bangalore to collect the right sized shoes from the

cycle shop and then drive back so I'd have cycle shoes for tomorrow. We've heard that he's just collected them and he probably won't get back here until maybe 11 o'clock tonight. Let's hope the shoes fit.

**A pedal swap was a welcome relief—** In the meantime Sachin was able to swap the pedals from the spare bike onto the main bike and those were standard pedals with toe clips on them and so that made it a lot better. Not as easy or as good as cycling with cleats, but still a lot better than trying to balance trainers on top of proper cleat pedals so that made a big difference.

**Bums and tums** My bum is still sore and after lunch another problem occurred because the food was very spicy and I developed some gastric problem that resulted in cramps in my lower right abdomen. I wondered whether I'd hurt it stretching but Sachin was convinced it was some gastric problem and gave me some gastroenteritis tablets that seemed to do the trick. I stopped for 15 minutes, walked around and stretched my side and I feel a lot better now.

**Beautiful bulls** We saw a lot of bulls today pulling carts and we probably saw 100 in total. Many of the bulls had beautiful painted horns and they were all carrying sand for various building projects around Tamil Nadu. I asked one of the groups to let me actually take control of the bull and the poor guys

stood in the back with the sand and my bike. We travelled in the cart for 100 yards or so.

**Tea in a bag anyone?** We had a few issues today with restaurants as we didn't come across one for breakfast. We stopped and Atul went in search of breakfast and came back with tea in bags which is a novelty to me. So we had tea in plastic bags and we had idli and sambar. Sachin used his cookery skills to make me a Masala omelette this morning in the hotel which was great.

### Today's lunch experience was unique

We also had a pretty rough experience at lunch today. The place was really unhygienic as there were flies everywhere. I slept in the kitchen on a day bed today. I have to say the temperature felt hotter than the centre of the sun. I just lay there in sweat. I didn't really sleep very well and the food wasn't great either. It was very spicy. I had quail and it sounds glamorous but it wasn't. The facilities weren't great as I had to wash my hands in a sink full of rubble. So that was a challenge today.

**We had a team meeting—** We had a team meeting today for the first time so we all sat on the ground together. I explained that we are a team and we are going to get to Kashmir if we work together effectively. It would be a team success and if we don't make it, it will be a team failure. We all have to do jobs we don't normally do and I said my job is the easiest.

I have to cycle every day and provide material for the blog whereas everyone else has their primary jobs. Atul is head of logistics and Sachin is the physio while Abdul and Mahadev are drivers but we all have to pitch in and do other jobs. We all need to get on and resolve any problems or issues between us, and if there are any major problems I will try to help resolve them.

**Mahadev's phone addiction** This was partly brought on by the loss of the shoes and I said that nobody was personally

responsible. It was a team failure and it was also slightly brought on by Mahadev who is obsessed with his mobile phone and I suggested at one stage that he have his left hand amputated to have an iPhone inserted in its place because he's on his phone almost continuously.

Either on calls or on messaging and whilst I didn't talk about that in the team briefing I'm going to have a quiet word with him. We need to make sure we're all helping to ensure the team is a success. Abdul told me that Mahadev was on the phone for

much of the night disturbing him and that's not right or fair so hopefully we can sort that out.

**Eat. Physio. Sleep.** That's about it. I'm just waiting for my tea and then I think we're going to eat, and then I'll have a session of physio with Sachin and then I need to get some sleep. It's been a tough day and I need to get a good sleep.

**Molly may have a fractured finger** In addition to Deb and Ed having damaged right hands I've heard that Molly was hit

by a hockey ball today. The nurse thinks she may have fractured one of her fingers so sadly my family seems to be falling like flies. That's three of them potentially with fractured or seriously damaged right hands.

**Good news on the bottom front** Dr Sachin has been inspecting my bottom and he's very pleased with the progress that has been made. He says that scar tissue is forming which is tougher than ordinary skin, so hopefully fingers crossed, I'm on the mend. It's still painful at the moment but it seems to be improving so that's good news.



# Day 6

Saturday 8 February

## Route details

From Salem  
To Krishnagiri  
Distance 600km  
Time 4 hours 58 minutes

### Damien

Another day of impressive stats, Chris. Not to mention connection with the locals (and a bit of good ol' road rage to boot) – I don't know how you fit it all into a day, especially when coupled with the fatigue that must be omnipresent as well. Glad to read the hard work uphill paid off with some cooler temperatures. All power to your pedals.

### Diane Card

I totally agree about the bucket shower, very refreshing, although mine was with cold water. You are doing amazing Chris and I know you will find solutions to all the hiccups and achieve your goal and be rightly proud of your achievement. Richard and I are rooting for you. Xxx

### Alan

Chris look forward to your blogs every day. Today was the first day without mention of your bottom, which I think means that it must be getting better. The pictures are also amazing – what an adventure! Whenever you feel down or tired, remember the widows whose lives you will change. You are an inspiration to us all Chris. Alan xxx

# Tackling Some Elevation Today

Another day completed and the tally is now 600km. Today was the first proper day in elevation and I gained 500 metres over 10km. It was hot today so it was hard work and there were lots of heavy trucks that were too close to me. I'm now in Krishnagiri and the altitude is higher here which is why the climate is much more temperate and more pleasant. It'll be interesting to see what it's like when we get into Bangalore tomorrow on day seven. We've had our last meal in the state of Tamil Nadu this evening and I'm really exhausted now.

**Looking older than my age** My mornings are really tough and I felt that way today after my early morning exercise. My eyes are baggy and my face looks craggy. I look a lot older than my 58 years and especially after a day of wind and sun.

**Bulls yesterday and cows today** I was a cow herd for a bit. I was walking two cows down the road and the little one at the back got a bit excited and jumped on the one in front nearly knocking Atul over so he was terrified.

**Shouting at motorcyclists** I was shouting at some motorcyclists as they overtook me, sat on my left and slowed down. What I didn't realise is that Sachin asked them to carry out this manoeuvre so I could overtake them, while he filmed it.

**Dreaming of Jackie Chan** I was sleeping outside two people's houses today for my lunchtime nap. There was some shouting by a mum to her kids inside one of the houses so Sachin goes in to ask them to be quiet. He explains there's a man (me) sleeping outside so they came outside to check. They were quiet for a few seconds before starting to shout again. The husband then went inside and put on a Jackie Chan film and it was really really loud. So Sachin went in again to ask them to put the volume down and, they didn't. After that Sachin left and the whole family came outside and started

playing around me. There was banging, drums being played, cans being tossed around so I didn't get much sleep but I did a get a little break.

**The man with long nails** We came across a man with long nails. He's been growing them for five years and the only time they ever get broken is when he gets drunk and falls over apparently.

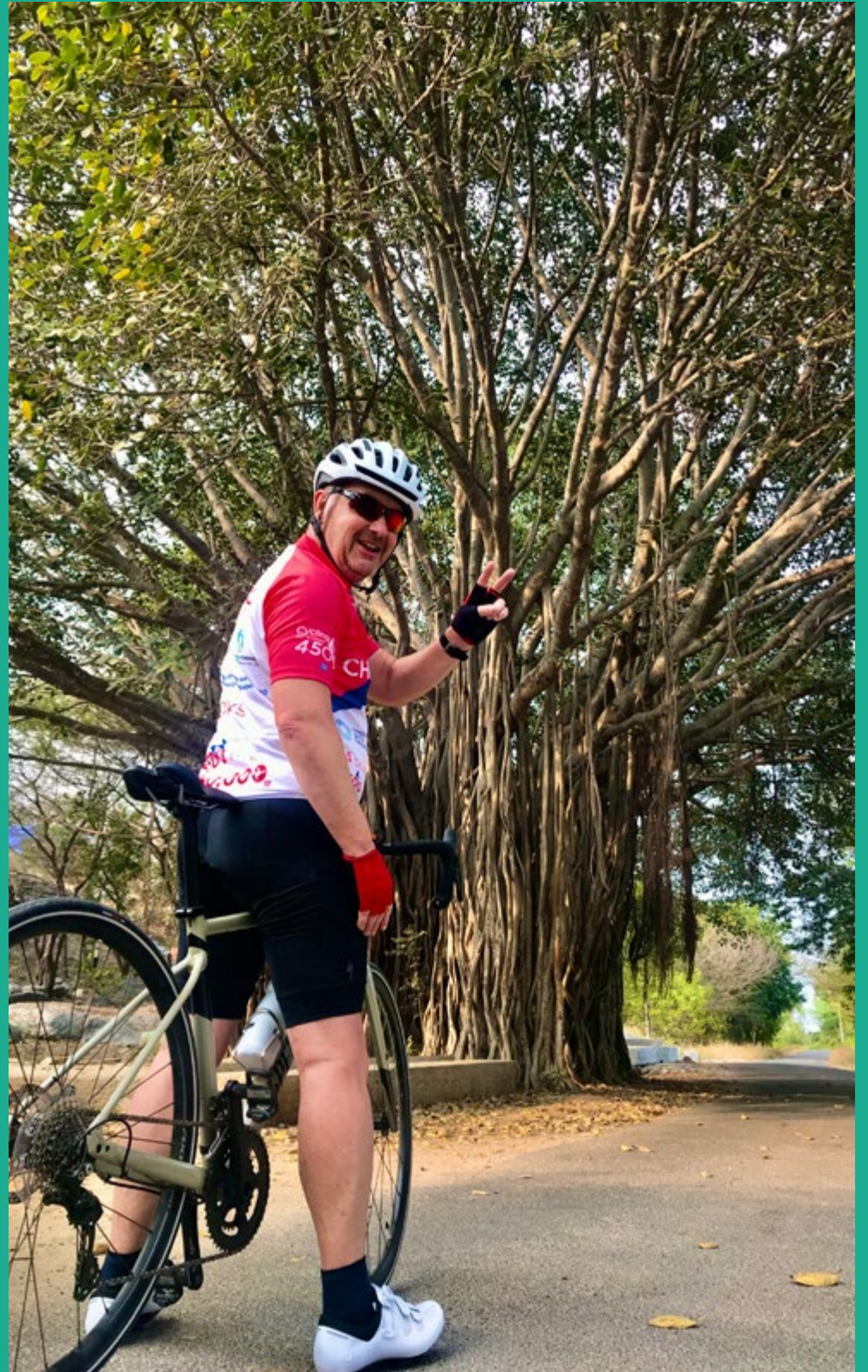
**I'm not losing any weight** I looked at my Garmin details to check the average over the last few days and I'm burning about 3,000 calories in total a day. That's the good news. The bad news is I don't seem to be losing any weight. I think I must just be eating lots and I need the energy I guess.

**Sachin the log** Atul had to get my cycle shoes yesterday and got back at about 10:30pm. He was exhausted after hours and hours of driving with Mahadev to get my shoes from Bangalore. Sachin had gone to sleep in the room they share but had Atul's key. So Atul starts knocking on Sachin's door and no response. Then he rings the button, no response. Then he rings Sachin's mobile phone but no response. Then he goes down to reception and they call the landline but no response again. Then they go upstairs with the reception staff, buzzing the door, knocking on the door but no response. There are other clients in the hotel all knocking

on the door but still no response. Nothing wakes Sachin up! In the end poor Atul has to end up in a tiny little box room because they have to give him a separate room because they can't wake Sachin up. Sachin's excuse is that he's so tired after a day of looking after me, nothing will wake him up so that was pretty impressive.

**Atul and Sachin are a dream team** I have to say again that Atul and Sachin are completely outstanding. They make sure I have tea when I arrive at the hotel and that I have hot water. They got a heating rod for the water to warm it up. They make sure that I have towels, shampoo and soap. They make sure I have my physio. They make sure that we find a restaurant and that my bags are delivered... everything! I cannot tell you how lucky I am. They are just amazing and they're providing every single bit of support I could ever want.

**Appreciating the simple things in life** An adventure like this makes you appreciate the really simple pleasures in life. And none come more simple, nor pleasurable, than a hot bucket of water with a mug to pour over your head. I'll tell you, it's just a dream. And when you think life can get no better, after the mug won't scoop any more water, you finish off your shower by getting the bucket and pouring it over your head. I can't tell you how wonderful that is after a long day in the heat of the Indian sun.



# Day 7

Sunday 9 February

## Route details

From Krishnagiri  
To Bangalore  
Distance 700km  
Time 5 hours 1 minute  
Guest Post Sachin

# I'm Knackered and Need my Bed

Day 7 and I'm completely knackered as well as sick. I have asked Sachin to do the blog for me today.

**It all started so well** Hi and I'm (Sachin) blogging for Chris today as he's not feeling well. Apart from Atul grazing his knees this morning, while out on a ride, the day started really well. There were a few climbs and Chris handled them very well. He was enjoying them.

We went for breakfast and after resuming the cycling we met some enthusiastic cyclists from Kolkata. They were cycling all the way to Mumbai over 15 days on a tandem. Their route covered 3,200km and they were sleeping in bus shelters and garages. They are promoting the non-use of single use plastics.

**Chris wasn't feeling great when we got to Bangalore** We reached the city of Bangalore early so we did a few loops of the city. As we were cycling around Bangalore Chris' condition deteriorated. He

was seriously affected by the day and other circumstances.

**Unhealthy Chinese food** There are a couple of reasons for Chris' condition today. Firstly, he had a feast last night that wasn't very healthy. He had a range of Chinese foods or local Indian/Chinese foods. This resulted in an early morning upset stomach.

**Racing the other cyclists** Secondly, when we met the enthusiastic cyclists from Kolkata Chris rode with them for a while. They were very fast as they had to cover over 200km per day to reach Mumbai in 15 days. I think Chris was a little intimidated so he started to cycle fast with them. I think the two cyclists were pushing it hard too and were at their limit. Chris wanted to show his strength so he kept pushing himself, almost relentlessly. We told Chris to slow down and stop but he didn't take

any notice. Chris was exhausted afterwards and probably realised he had over exerted himself. He then took a break from cycling.

**Straight to bed** The pollution and dust in Bangalore is very bad which didn't help the situation. When he got to his Oyo room he went to the bathroom and then straight to bed.

To help him recover I gave him hot water and one paracetamol. So, after half an hour of sleeping he is now feeling a bit better. He has decided not to eat tonight but I insisted that he at least have some soup and salad, so let's see.

**Will Chris cycle tomorrow?** I did consider calling a doctor but Chris's condition has improved. He says he is feeling better but 'still very rough'. We need to see how Chris is feeling tomorrow to see whether he can cycle or not.





#### **Olivia**

Sorry to hear you're not feeling well Chris, I hope you feel better tomorrow after a good night's rest. I've really enjoyed reading your blog and I'm amazed at how far you've cycled already! All the best and good luck for the rest of the trip!

#### **Alan**

Make sure you rest and take in loads of fluids Chris. Also when you do restart make sure you eat regularly whilst on the bike. Keep it up – you are doing a tremendous job!

#### **Gavin D**

Chris, sending you much energy and support from London. In awe of your huge effort already, and wishing you a swift recovery (and a good rest as needed). Best wishes also to Sachin and all your support team for their great work. Love, Gavin

#### **nigelfarr**

Hi Chris, hoping you had a much better day and are returning to top form and making the most of the little down time you have. Even the thought of a single day's ride in the conditions you are facing is humbling. You are a simply remarkable inspiration for us all. Many thanks to everyone supporting you both on the ground and in their thoughts. Very best wishes at all times. Nigel.

#### **peterchatergmailcom**

Great work so far, Chris. Have loved the breakfast briefings of your progress and the way you bring the journey to life. Again, huge respect for putting your body through this for such a worthy cause. Looks like 3,000 calories p. day aren't enough :)! Take care of your body and look after yourself, loads of love from the GR gang.

#### **live**

Keep going Chris! Just keep plugging on. Racing tandems is a mistake! They can go much faster than a single cyclist if they've got two well matched people on; all to do with fluid dynamics.

When we're on our tandem I often get told by cheery locals that "she's not moving her legs!." So you can race us any time and win I'm sure!!

#### **Damien**

Hard to know what to say when tomorrow must have already dawned by the time I type, and even harder to know just how rough it must be for you over there Chris. I suspect you've been in rough places like this before, though, so hopefully once rested a little you can take a few moments to revisit those to help you make the next decisions – which will be the right ones whatever they are.

Sounds like the team there are all right behind you doing the job being asked of them (and more – judging by some of those blogs!), so heed their words too. And I'm already in awe of the 700km you have covered in a week.

#### **Charles Kim**

Chris, I'm inspired by the challenge you've taken on and the good cause. I hope you rest well and regain the strength to endure during this difficult middle section of the journey. Many are cheering you on around the world!

#### **Savy**

Chris – 700km back to back is an incredible feat, well done! Do take care of yourself – we are all rooting for you and you are in our thoughts! All the very best!

# Day 8

Monday 10 February

## Route details

From Bangalore

To Anantpur

Distance 800km

Time 4 hours 22 minutes

**Sachin gave me a pep talk** Sachin gave me a pep talk this morning. He said my body was a bit ill but not too bad. The real problem was in my head, the psychology. He warned me not to let my mood drop because it would be difficult to recover a positive attitude. He was right as I was wondering if I should take a day off or perhaps do 20km today and catch up on another ride.

I was already thinking of ways to make it easier for me. Luckily I was able to do some gentle warm up exercises this morning but nothing like the usual routine. I was able to eat a little cereal and I had some black tea rather than my usual chai.

**Feeling better after 32km** When I started cycling the temperature was cool as it was 15 degrees so I wore a sports fleece to begin with. The traffic was awful, dangerous and not much fun at all. I was still feeling rough and grim at that point. It was only at

# A Much Needed Pep Talk This Morning

Frankly it's a miracle I've been able to do 100km today given how awful I felt last night and I felt really rough this morning. The team were amazing and they had a look of panic and worry last night. Everyone was quiet wondering if I would be able to cycle again at all.

the 32km mark that I started feeling better. Breakfast was a little difficult to eat. I just had an igli, tea and a little bit of sambhar, which is like a vegetable curry.

**The human body is resourceful** It was helpful that Jose reminded me that Day 7 of my 30 marathons was also tough. He reminded me that Ed, my youngest son, had said that the human body can do so much more than you think it can. Often the problem is in the head and not the body which was certainly the case today.

**Life felt good and the view wasn't bad** There were two code reds (when I need to go to the toilet) today in the last 10 kilometres. My stomach is now properly upset which is good in a way and I'm surprised it wasn't really upset before. I felt lots of pain in my stomach. Both cars have had a practice for code reds so they are now ready for any future code reds. It was lovely to just sit in a field overlooking the Indian savannah with the hills in the background and the sun setting. Life felt good.

**Naked gentlemen walking down the road** I've just seen a wonderful sight from the car as I've just seen a Padyatra which is a walking pilgrimage. There were members of the Jain religion. There were two gentleman devotees and both of them were completely naked walking down the road. This is apparently a reasonably common sight.

**Karnataka cuisine** We left the state of

Tamil Nadu yesterday and we arrived in Karnataka later on in the day. Therefore we will be coming across different foods and I will update you in due course on the cuisine here.

**Delhi is 20 days away** I saw a sign today for Delhi at 1,975km. I almost feel like I'm using timing from the middle ages when people use 'days' to describe travel. For me reaching Delhi is 20 days of travel away.

**Sachin reunited with his wife** It's a shame that my memories of Bangalore are not good in terms of how I felt and the terrible traffic. It was, however, really lovely that Sachin's wife (Ashmi) was able to see him in the evening and the team were able to go out for dinner. It was a shame I couldn't join them. She seems lovely and I thanked her profusely for letting me borrow Sachin for 45 days.

**Congrats Anna & Charlie and David & Kaz** Two friends of mine have had babies since I started cycling which is lovely. So a big shout out to Anna and Charlie and another shout out to David and Kaz. They have both had their very first babies which is great news.

**Bottom update** Here's an update on my bottom. In 2015 when I did my 30 marathons Sachin used to come into my room first thing in the morning at 6am with a bowl of cereal. He had a tub of Vaseline to rub on my feet before taping them up.

Now it's one step worse for the poor guy. He comes with my cereal and he asks me to lie on a pillow on my bed while he inspects my bottom. He then applies some antiseptic and some dressing. The right cheek is much much better. Sachin is happy and it didn't have a dressing on it this morning. The left cheek is still pretty bad and very sore.

The worst part of my day is removing the dressing from my bottom. It takes at the very least 20 minutes and I'm in absolute agony. There is always something going on with me and it's about prioritising what's important and I'm currently concerned about my upset stomach which is making it difficult to eat as well as keeping hydrated.

**Thank you for your support** Thank you for all the comments, support and love that you are sending through. It definitely helps and I read the blog every day after it has been published so I see all the comments.



**Rohit Kumar**

Awesome Chris ...take care of yourself and be hydrated!

**Clive**

Thank goodness you didn't join the naked pilgrims! Good observation about it all being in the head! Keep positive Chris, every turn of the pedals is one less to do!

**David and Holly**

Much more positive today Chris; great to hear you're feeling on the up. Things must be going better as there's more news on your bottom! Wise words from Ed that it's all in the head. Keep going team. David and Holly x

**Nihal**

Chris, you are an inspiration! We are all willing you on from London.

**Brian rutland**

Hi Chris, got to take my hat off to you, you're doing great, keep up the positive attitude and look after yourself, Brian and Maureen. Cheers

**Damien**

Chris – superb effort to get out there and get going. No doubt the starting hurdle is one of the biggest at present, but the fact that you began to feel better part way through the ride (rather than the other way around) is a really positive sign that your body is starting to adjust to and, dare we say it (!), enjoy the experience. And to the whole team: Keep up the inspirational work.

**Seamus**

Reminds me of the "naked Rambler" – now there's an idea for your next charity gig!

**Steve W**

Chris, I am just catching up on your adventure. It is amazing that not just that you decided to do it, more so that you push yourself on and through whatever struggle you face. Dig in. You have got this.

# An Almost Perfect Day

End of day nine, so that's 900km done. I'm feeling a lot better today and I hesitate to say this but the day was almost perfect. I felt good, my stomach felt good and the conditions were good. I had a good night's sleep and the bed was comfy as was the pillow. I had a light meal last night. I had some tailwind today but it was mostly crosswinds which I will take any day over a headwind. So far I've mostly had to contend with headwinds.

**Dodging traffic on the roads** There's a video of me which is a time-lapse and it gives a sense of the challenges that I face when I get off the main road. I'm dodging motorcycles, buses, tractors and all the rest.

**I slept in a cubicle** We had a lunch in the cubicle from a restaurant. The guys were fantastic as I ate my lunch quickly. They went outside to eat so they left me to sleep in the cubicle, which was very kind of them.

**Atul to the rescue for lunch** I had a super treat at lunchtime as Atul wanted to make sure I had non-spicy food. In Bangalore the guys checked to ensure my clear vegetable soup was completely non-spicy but it ended up being full of spice! Therefore, to make sure and to help my recovery Atul went into the kitchen.

**Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh** Yesterday we went into the state of Karnataka leaving Tamil Nadu behind. We only caught a little tiny corner of Karnataka because we went almost immediately into Andhra Pradesh which is the third state we're travelling through. The capital of Andhra Pradesh is shared between Telangana and Hyderabad and we will reach the latter in around three days time.

**Thank you Oyo** We had a lovely welcome from the Oyo hotel when we arrived and from Manisha specifically. The hotel, RuRu

Comfort Inn which is part of the Oyo group, arranged for me to have a welcome aarti. I've got a Tilak on my forehead and they lit a lamp which was incredibly kind of them. I just want to thank Vikas who works at Oyo as he has been brilliant in helping Atul sort out any issues we've had with the hotels along the way.

**Fundraising for widows in Kashmir** As I'm sure most of you know I'm cycling to help widows in Kashmir for an empowerment project that is going to launch later this year. This project will enable widows to have the tools to earn a living for themselves and their children. There are many challenges in Kashmir and to be a widow is a sort of double whammy. Each dollar goes a long way in India and if many widows have skills training at a cheap cost it will make a big difference.

So far and across all platforms we've raised over \$320,000 which is fantastic. Thank you for all your kind support. If you haven't yet supported me, it would be lovely if you could do so, and encourage any of your friends to do so as well. Any help you can provide would be lovely, thank you.

**What a difference a centimetre makes!** Sachin and I have both been watching YouTube videos of the perfect position to be on a bike. We've been looking at saddle height, saddle position and the distance

from the handlebars. We agreed to move the saddle forward about a centimetre. And, I have to say a centimetre makes the world of difference. I feel much more comfortable on the bike. My arms aren't as extended and the pressure on my wrists isn't quite as bad, although one of my fingers on my right hand is still numb unfortunately. That is, however, the least of my worries. And, the leg pressure and leg power feels better with the saddle forward.

**Meeting two Hijra today** Today I was blessed by two people who look like women but they are actually Hijra. Hijras are referred to as the third gender in India and are eunuchs, transexual and transgender people. They are a fairly big community and they spend their lives giving blessings. They go to weddings, funerals, christenings and other similar events. If you don't give them money they'll cast a spell on you, and if you give them money they'll bless you. They gave me a rupee coin as part of my blessing.

**A pig herder today** I've been a cow herd already and today I was a pig herd. I was able to walk down the street for a little while with a couple of pigs and a big stick. So that was fun and there were lots of dogs barking and general wonderful Indian chaos.

**Sachin is still pushing me!** We got back at a decent time today and because I said that today was almost perfect, Sachin

wasn't quite satisfied. He decided that we (Sachin, Atul and I) were going for a run. Goodness knows how far and I hope not too far. I asked why on earth we were going for a run to which he replied, "If you are a javelin thrower, you don't just spend all day throwing a javelin, you would do lots of other exercises as well."

Sachin tells me that the reason we're doing the running is for cardio, although frankly I feel like I'm doing a lot of cardio. It's a different variety of cardio and it'll involve my upper body as well, and maybe some core. It will strengthen my legs in a different way, which he's keen to do, and that's why we're doing the exercise in the morning.

**My Royal Enfield dream** I've always said that I would love to do a trip on a Royal Enfield motorbike to retrace the steps that I took on my 30 marathons in 30 days. I'd also like to retrace the route for what I hope will be my successful journey from Kanyakumari to Srinagar. Sachin got me to flex my tricep for a photo and to suck my stomach in. I'm hoping that by the time I get to Kashmir I won't have to do any sucking in.

# Day 9

Tuesday 11 February

## Route details

From Anantpur

To Anantpur

Distance 900km

Time 4 hours 17 minutes

## Emily Wheeler

Chris! We were at HSF today and sorely missed you but I loved speaking to the ladies on reception who are all following your journey and telling me how inspirational you are. We are all following you at MQ too and reading your blog is amazing. You are doing something incredible and sending you so much luck and love! Go Chris!!

## Alan Peckham

Loving the blog posts Chris – getting a small insight on the challenges of cycling in India and can only say chapeau! What a great effort and don't forget to apply the chammy cream...

## Seamus

Although your journey clearly has its hazards, at least you're unlikely to be troubled by "coronavirus". Although it might be an idea to stay away from chickens, particularly if they're sneezing. And seafood.

## Damien

Great news, Chris. And the variety of upbeat reporting you and the team were able to share gives us a glimpse that things are certainly on the up for you. And yes – a centimetre can make a HUGE difference. Well done to the team for sorting that saddle position out.



# Day 10

Wednesday 12 February

## Route details

From Anantpur

To Dhone

Distance 1,000km

Time 4 hours 35 minutes

# Reaching the 1,000km Mark

Day 10 done and that's 1,000km done which is just brilliant. Not least given how I felt in Bangalore. It was a day of cycling on the NH44 (National Highway 44) and there weren't many dhabas (roadside restaurants) and places to stop. Therefore it was just long stretches of roads so it was a little tough from that point of view. The most difficult bit was a 20-25km uphill stretch that started early afternoon as I never thought it was going to come to an end. It was certainly a hot day today. Well into the thirties, and I worked up a real sweat cycling up that 25km hill.

**Traffic going the wrong way!** I just need to make sure that I cycle straight on the road and in particular as there are still bikes, buses and cars that come the wrong way down dual carriageways. I have to look out for them and there seems to be a particular etiquette where I have to pass them on the outside rather than on the inside, which seems strange to me because they can see what's coming behind me.

**I apologise...** For the most part I definitely owe an apology to Indian drivers because I thought it was going to be more challenging than it is. It actually helps that nearly everyone seems to use the fast lane so that gives me some space and I can ride along. There's a bit of a hard shoulder, not a big hard shoulder, so it provides a little bit of safety.

So the only challenge is when people are undertaking, undertaking lorries in particular. As I have explained previously the biggest danger is when somebody is undertaking the undertaker, if you excuse the pun.

**'Great songs' via Spotify** One of the highlights of the day was playing music from Spotify. I've got a playlist that I call 'Great Songs'. The title is not very original but it was lovely being reunited with some of those tunes and 15km just disappeared listening to some of those songs. My two standout tracks today were The Promise by Tracy Chapman and Unchained Melody by The Righteous Brothers.

**We are professionals** Sachin is coming into his own with his photography skills as you can see from some of the pictures he's been taking. He's been researching tips and techniques. He's been looking at YouTube and Instagram for help on taking cycling photographs. Some of the pictures he's taken look great. So maybe the two of us will have a new job when we get back. I'll be a cycle model and Sachin will be a sports photographer.

**The Taadi Nunjus were delicious** Atul also kindly brought me some fruit because he thought it would be good for my stomach. It was wrapped in some beautiful leaves

and the fruit is called Taadi Nunju. It was delicious and it comes from the Taadi plant.

**Really friendly lovely people** Nearly everybody we've met have been incredibly friendly and interested in what we're doing, and in the Loomba Foundation. We met some businessmen from Andhra Pradesh today and Sachin told them about the fundraising and Kashmir project. We gave them our brochure. So its great to meet and talk to people about what we're doing.

**Atul was on laundry duty** Atul was on domestic duties today which meant that he stayed behind to collect all of our laundry as there was loads of it. In fact, I had run out of cycle shorts and tops, so it was certainly timely. Poor Mahadev has got a bad chest so Atul took him to the local hospital with him. He was seen by a doctor and got some antibiotics.

**New cycle shorts** Atul has been a star and managed to source me some new cycle shorts from Delhi and Pawan (from the Loomba Foundation) will bring those when he joins us on Friday. Also, we had a problem with the cleats (bicycle pedals where my bicycles shoes clip in) again as we found there was a screw missing. Atul has been brilliant in sourcing this screw which is pleasing.





**Clive**

Well done Chris on the 1000km milestone. Kilometrestone really. Give the bike a check over, make sure that nothing has worked loose like your cleat (mind you you must have a screw loose to be doing this!!!) tighten absolutely everything up carefully so as not to strip any threads but after that distance in a new bike you may find the odd thing has been shaken free!!!

**Naomi Linsey**

What a milestone, congratulations!! Hope that the Taadi Nunjus were indeed good for your stomach and that you managed to get enough sleep.

**Ramyaa**

Well done Chris!! Great to see that you're in good spirits and back in form. The nunjus (we call them nungus in TN) look great – really refreshing on a hot day! They come from a type of palm tree (toddy palm).

**Damien**

Great work Chris and team. The daily "routine" seems to be working nicely now, so keep focused on maintaining a steady rhythm (and a reporting stream of the amazing encounters that you continue to have) and the kilometres will continue to pass steadily by.

**Alan**

Well done Chris on getting to 1000! Well done also for surviving the wedding – it sounded like it was right in your room! We are all behind you – keep it up

**Gavin D**

Chris, really great to read that you're back on top form again, and many congratulations on the 1000km milestone! I'm also enjoying Sachin's photographs as they get increasingly artistic. Interesting to hear the daily schedule – like your son, I'd wondered quite how it all worked! Do please let us know what other music tracks you are cycling to. All best, Gavin.

# Day 11

Thursday 13 February

## Route details

From Anantpur  
To Kurnool  
Distance 1,100km  
Time 4 hours 14 minutes

### Paula

What an experience and great that you are getting stronger all the time!

### Roddy

Well done Chris. So pleased it's going well for you and the team at present. Bank it! Tomorrow is another 100km day, literally. Take care

### David and Holly

Bollywood dancing or Dad dancing??  
Perhaps Molly should be the judge!!  
Another great day team and glad all's well on the bottom front. David and Holly x

### Clive

Please please please don't make your next challenge 45 days of Dad dancing!

# The Big Thumbs Up

We've just finished Day 11 so it's 1,100km completed which is great!

**My new personal best** I reached a new personal best today. I think 4h 17m was my previous personal best and the one before that was 4h 18m. Today was 4h 14m so that's cool and I hope one day I might be able to do a 4 hour 100km. Let's hope so and we'll see.

### Today's drama... the missing tyre levers

The drama today was Sachin joined me cycling for the first 20km but at 15km we had our second puncture. I then got on the spare bike to cycle the remainder of the 20km, finishing for breakfast, and that's when the fun and games started. Instead of me having my physio the bike needed some treatment so it was upside down on my yoga mat while Sachin went to search for the tyre levers to remove the tyre from the wheel.

He was getting increasingly stressed as he couldn't find the tyre levers and then he looked some more and some more but to no avail. The tension was rising and it looked like we weren't going to fix the tyre because the levers were missing. All of sudden Mahadev appeared with my tyre completely off the bike, which he did as a result of the last team talk when we talked about using our initiative. Mahadev had found the tyre levers and had taken the tyre off while Sachin was frantically searching for them, so that was quite amusing.

**Sleeping with other men** I slept in a sort of store room today which belonged to a restaurant. There were two other beds and there were two other guys also sleeping there. So the three of us were happily sleeping

together which was an interesting experience. You don't get that in the Taj too often.

**Cycling is my new job** Today was one of the first days that I thought of myself more as a cyclist. I remember when I did the marathons Sachin told me that I need to think about the marathons as my new job... I don't have a job and I cycle for pleasure. Cycling is my job and it's what I do each day. I have breaks, finish my day and my day basically involves cycling. And I remember the quote from Ed my younger son from the marathons where the encouragement was "walking is what we do." Now the quote is just "cycling is what we do."

**Andhra Pradesh/Telangana** We were in the state of Andhra Pradesh for three days and we're now into Telangana. Andhra Pradesh was split in 2014 as the northern part of the state became known as Telangana, the 29th Indian state. Hyderabad, where we are heading now to meet Pawan, is currently the shared capital of the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. In due course it will be the capital of Telangana and, Andhra Pradesh will have a new capital. It's new capital is actually in the process of being built and is called Amravati.

### Sachin gives me the big thumbs up

People have kindly been interested in my bottom as a result of the pain I have been in since Day 1. The good news on the bottom front is that the outside of the skin seems to have hardened but I still have some internal bruising. Sachin has given my bottom a big thumbs up (not literally, that would be obscene).

### I should have had an ergonomic

**assessment!** Sam, my oldest son, asked me today if I had a full ergonomic assessment on my bike before starting the cycling so I could get the saddle position right, the handlebar position, my pedals and so on. That was a mistake as I definitely should have had a full assessment. Just so that I could optimise my position on the bike. I think I'm close to being in a good position but it still doesn't feel quite right. When you spend an hour or two on a bike you don't notice these things but when you spend between 4 and 5 hours on a bike every day, you want to be in the best position possible.

**Another team meeting** We thought it would be a good idea to have another team meeting seeing that we've now been going for 10 and a bit days. It was to share how we thought everything was going. It was important so we could all raise things and feel comfortable doing so. It actually proved helpful because Mahadev in particular had some stuff he wanted to get off his chest. He was becoming increasingly vocal and loud and in a way it was good because I couldn't understand him which meant I was calm and focused.

The other guys could understand everything he was saying and it was good because he got it off his chest. I guess we all have to understand that we're going to have good days and bad days. All of us, and we're going to have in-between days and other days on a scale of 1 to 100. As we say in Alcoholics Anonymous, 'this too shall pass'. The good stuff, the bad stuff, the in between stuff

and we need to get comfortable with our feelings and how we are in the moment.

**The 1,000km celebration dances** To celebrate yesterday's achievement of reaching 1,000km I did a little Bollywood dancing.

**A shout out to James and Anne** I had another section today of 15km with my music which was nice, and it's nice to have that as a change, not all of the time. A shout out to James and Anne for introducing me to Christina Perri as I've been listening to a number of her tracks including 'Jar of hearts'.

**The smell of dogs** Atul took a rather amusing photo of a dog with half his body on one step and the other half on the lower step. There are dogs everywhere in India and they're poor scavenging things. Chasing people, chasing me and there are loads of puppies around as well. Sadly there's quite often a reminder on Indian roads of how dangerous things can be because I've seen many many poor dogs that have been run over. It's quite a powerful thing because the odour from their bodies is incredibly strong and overwhelming. I can now pick up the odour from maybe 200 metres away. I know there'll be a poor dog, either in the road or the side of the road, that's met its end via the front of a lorry.

**Atul is handing Pawan the baton** The other big news is that Pawan, from the Loomba Foundation, is joining us. He's already at the hotel so we're looking forward to seeing him and having dinner with him this

evening. Atul is getting very excited about his holiday. No, no, no, its not holiday as he's just going home and going back to work in Delhi. Basically, it's a holiday and Pawan will then take over and if he does a good job we certainly won't want Atul back (I'm being sarcastic).

**Circular ride tomorrow** In terms of route we ended up about 120km short of Hyderabad so we're now driving there. We're staying near the airport and then tomorrow we're going to do the usual funny day of a circle and end up back at the same hotel.

#### **A nice message from Lord Loomba**

Lord Loomba who is the founder of the Loomba Foundation shared a nice message with me yesterday after my 1,000km milestone:

Chris,

Congratulations for completing 1,000km successfully. I am proud of you.

Best wishes for the remaining 3,500km, which you will also complete with your efforts and God's blessings.

Lord Loomba CBE



# Day 12

Friday 14 February

## Route details

From Hyderabad  
To Hyderabad  
Distance 1,200km  
Time 4 hours 11 minutes

### Chris Parsons

Thanks for a great guest blog Atul (Sachin is already getting stressed about doing his). Enjoy your time with your family and come back soon. Thanks for looking after me so beautifully – Love, Chris.

### Atul

Thanks for your comments and many thanks for building such a fantastic team. You are a star and will remain a star forever for us.

### Holly and David

Great guest blog Atul – interesting to hear your side of the adventures!

### Atul

Thank you so very much for reading the blog every day and for your comments especially for me on my guest blog

### Siew Boon Lou

Happy birthday Atul. Enjoy your “break”

### Atul

Thank you so very much for supporting us. Please keep commenting, it helps the team and especially Chris.

### Meenal

Good going Chris. Nice to know of all the side adventures Atul.

# I’m Going Home Tomorrow

I’m really pleased to report that Day 12 is done which is great, and to my amazement, despite some of the country roads we traveled on for some of the time, it was another personal best. I have kindly asked Atul (I’m about to go on holiday, whoopee!) Palta to write today’s blog. I hope you enjoy it and over to Atul...

**Hi I’m Atul** Chris surprised me this morning as he told that I will be the guest blogger today as I’m going back home tomorrow seeing that Pawan has now joined us.

I am the Director of Skills Training and Empowerment at the Loomba Foundation. I arrange and look after the various empowerment projects that we have in India. I basically look after any projects that are running in India.

I also help Lord Loomba to organise charity and fundraising events. I’ve been working at the Loomba Foundation for 13 years. I live with my wife and my son in Delhi and I am originally from Punjab. I’m here to support Chris, looking after the logistics side of Cycle for Widows.

**Chris has a big fan club** Chris has a big fan club as he draws a lot of attention wherever he goes. We took many photos with some locals from a village we passed today. The photo of the lady is from a village and she is wearing her traditional colourful dress.

**Lunchtime nap in a derelict building** We stopped for lunch and the restaurant guys were not so friendly today. We couldn’t find a good place for Chris to have a nap, so we found an abandoned building where he went for a nap.

**Another loop due to accommodation** Today we did a loop on our route again because we couldn’t get accommodation

between Kurnool and Hyderabad. Also Chris had a bad experience of riding on the country roads so after lunch he decided to stay on the highway. He completed 65km before lunch and now he’s continuing on the highway. The weather is not very good as it’s sunny but windy.

**Our car had a puncture today** When we came down from the hotel this morning and we were getting ready we noticed, to our surprise, that we had our first car tyre puncture. The guys replaced the tyre and we have a punctured tyre in the car that we need to get repaired.

**Chris is getting frustrated with his weight** After doing his stretches Chris thought he would weigh himself to see if he had lost any weight. Unfortunately Chris has not lost any weight, not even a gram! He was surprised that he is still 83kg and that is after cycling 1,160km.

**What’s our routine?** To give you an idea of our daily routine we wake up every day at 5.30am. We freshen up and at 6am we all go for a warm up before the cycling starts. Today Pawan joined us for the warm up. Afterwards, Chris has some porridge and we all have morning tea. We then get ready for the day. We pack our things into the car, fill our bottles with water and we check the cycle pressure and, make sure everything is OK. Once we are happy Chris starts cycling. Before he sets off I take a picture of Chris on his bike. After 20km of cycling Chris stops

and we all have breakfast. Today we went to a restaurant and we did some stretching before eating.

**Today’s routine** After Chris has completed his first 20km, he will do some stretches with Sachin and then we have breakfast. After that we start again for another 20km but today Chris didn’t want to ride on the NH 44 (National highway) the whole time, so we looked for some country roads, and discovered that the roads were not in the best condition for cycling. It was very tough for Chris to ride on those roads, anyhow he completed his 20km which was followed by some stretching.

**My role in logistics** I help to find restaurants and hotels so we have the best or most appropriate places to have breakfast, lunch and so on. I am quite often explaining to people the purpose of the cycling and who the Loomba Foundation is as well as what we intend to do with the money that is raised.

I liaise with Pawan in the office (when he’s there) to ensure it all goes as smoothly as possible and there are no hiccups. If anything needs to be sourced from Delhi or elsewhere be it cycling shorts, bicycle cleats, etc. I will ensure it is arranged.

**Catching Chris in pain is hard** I haven’t had any success taking any photos or videos of Chris screaming and shouting when he has the tough physio sessions with Sachin.

When I see a face of pain I always seem to miss getting a good photo. I should add that Chris does his best to not let me take these 'painful' photos. I will try harder when I rejoin Chris again for the last leg of the cycling.



### We have a great team

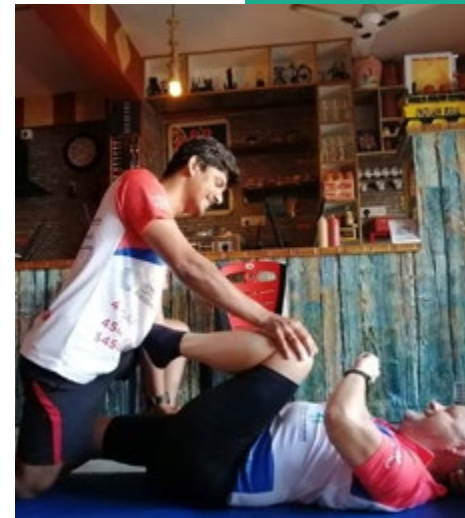
I have to say that we have a fantastic team. Sachin is brilliant as he not only takes care of the physio side but he does so much more taking care of Chris. The two drivers are great as they help throughout the day. We had a good team when Chris walked 30 marathons but this team is superior.

We are all in sync and we are enjoying the experience. Pawan has been with us all day learning the job and I'm with him now answering his questions. Chris has been great doing the cycling of course and wherever we go people are impressed with his efforts to help widows.

### I'm going home and...

I miss my wife and son so I'm looking forward to going home to see them as well as my other relatives and friends. I'm really missing North Indian food as the food here in the south is really different. It's really hot here so I can't wait to go back to the cooler temperature of Delhi.

I will also be celebrating my birthday again which I'm looking forward to.



# Day 13

Saturday 15 February

## Route details

From Hyderabad  
To Kamareddi  
Distance 1,300km  
Time 4 hours 14 minutes

### Paula

What a mix of a day and love the photos! For music, try Coldplay/ Fly with Me, The Verve/Bitter Sweet Symphony, Goo Goo Dolls/Iris and Hootie and the Blowfish/Only Wanna Be With You. Enjoy! Paula & John xxx

### David and Holly

Hi Chris. We think you might be their next Parliamentary candidate, if you can fit it in with all your other new jobs....How about "Happy" by Pharell Williams, "Uptown Funk" by Mark Ronson and "Invictus" – read by Morgan Freeman; kept David going on his long walk. Have another great day.

### Paul H

James Taylor – Fire & Rain is one of my favourite all time tunes. Of similar time/mould, how about Buffalo Springfield – For what it's worth.

### Paul H

Oh and why not throw in Wichita Lineman – Glen Campbell for good measure. Also, Christopher Cross. – Sailing is a great one for taking your mind off things x

### Paul H

OK last one – Judy Blue Eyes, Crosby, Stills & Nash x

# Another Day and 1,300km Completed

Day 13 is done and I'm a bit tired which is not surprising I guess. We spent most of the day on the National Highway (NH44). In fact the day started in a challenging way in that we were on the south side of Hyderabad and cyclists are not allowed to go on the big ring road around Hyderabad. That means I would have had to have gone through the middle which would have been really dangerous. Therefore we decided to drive around the loop which took a good hour. It was an unsettling start to the morning and I ended up falling asleep as did Sachin. So when I actually came to start the day on my bike I was feeling really sleepy and my morning warm up had gone to waste so that was a bit challenging.

**Team meeting after Atul leaves** We had a team gathering before we set off this morning from Hyderabad because Atul was leaving to fly back to Delhi so I wanted to speak to everyone. I wanted to say that in a small team a change of member is going to make a big difference so we all need to be very conscious of that with Pawan wanting to step in his shoes.

Atul and Sachin have a very close bond, not only from this time but also from last time in 2015, so for Pawan to come and step into that position was never going to be easy. I just said that we need to be mindful of this and we need to look after each other. I also added that we need to be particularly helpful and understanding over the next couple of days until we develop a new routine.

**Atul was very emotional** Atul is so sweet. Even though he's clearly looking forward to see his wife and son, he was also clearly upset about leaving us. Just before we started to drive off he started crying. He looked very forlorn as we parted ways.

**My bike gets all the attention!** Right at the end of the day, we came across a whole bunch of people celebrating near a small temple, and apparently their candidate in a local election had just been successful.

An independent candidate but one that is supporting the BJP party so they were all very very happy and seemed even happier to see me. Although I have noticed one thing which is slightly depressing from my point of view as people seem more interested in my bike than me and what I'm up to. They all want to know how much it cost, how many gears it's got, how light it is etc. So there is a great fascination with my Specialized bike.

**Flying plates at nap time** For my lunchtime nap today I slept right next to a kitchen. All the plates from the kitchen were made from metal so as soon as the kitchen staff washed something they would throw the plates across the room into a pile somewhere. You can imagine the noise of these metal plates clattering on each other. Sachin asked them to be quiet but I told him not to bother as they're just doing their job. Anyway the long and short of it is that I had about 5 mins sleep, but I did get some rest.

**Woman with a cone on her head** We took an amusing picture of a lady with a cone on her head and a flag on top of the cone. She was basically working with her husband, who was cutting grass in the middle of the dual carriageway, and she was there to warn drivers. She was protecting her husband which was rather sweet as well as amusing.

**Working 10 hours in a field** Sachin took a nice picture of me for my morning physio session so probably at 40km with my legs up on my multi purpose commode.

My feet are up to allow the fluid to drain out of my legs, but as you can see I had a beautiful view over some paddy fields, and I chatted to Sachin about it to say look it's easier for me just to be on my bike for 4 or 5 hours a day for 45 days, yet these poor ladies working in the field bent over removing weeds from the rice paddies are out in the fields for 10 hours a day, bent over in the boiling sun, so that's a real challenge.

**We met a widow called Saida** At a tea stall we met a lady who ran a little stall and it was not more than a tent really. The guys called it desi tea which means country tea. She explained her husband had been killed right in front of the tea stall by a road accident so she was clearly interested in the fact that we were raising money for widows.

**Getting to the finish line** My three major worries in terms of being able to cycle all the way to Kashmir is what I call the three I's. That refers to illness, injury or incident. I try not to think about it but I guess those would be the main things that would impact me being able to finish.

**I'm listening to...** In terms of music today, I've been listening to James Taylor, some older stuff and some newer stuff. I remember when some of the newer stuff was released that one of the critics called it something like "if heaven has a sound track, then surely this is it"

**Send me your 'desert island discs'** I'm keen to add to my collection of songs to cycle to. A bit like Desert Island Discs which is a radio programme where you choose your eight favourite songs to take with you to an island. Please send me one or two of your favourite tracks as if you were appearing on this show and I will download them from Spotify to listen.

**Indian railways** I'm not for a minute going to claim any credit on behalf of the British for the Indian railways, the third largest network in the world. I'm very mindful of the powerful and polemic book that Shashi Tharoor wrote called Inglorious Empire which is highly critical of the British' role in India. The only two things that he is willing to give the British credit for are – 1. Bringing tea to India from China; 2. Rather begrudgingly: cricket. Anything else like the English language, rule of law, democracy, railway etc. He's not prepared to accept that the British had any proper role in that.

**Bird watching** We ended the day having done a long hard slog along the NH44 in what must have been 35 degree temperatures so it was very hot. Too many headwinds unfortunately, not many side winds so that made it tough as well. For the last 7km we managed to find a small country lane and that was a real tonic to finish the day on because we were travelling through rice fields, corn fields, we saw a lake and we were able to spot a number of unusual birds. If you followed my 30 marathons fundraising you may recall that

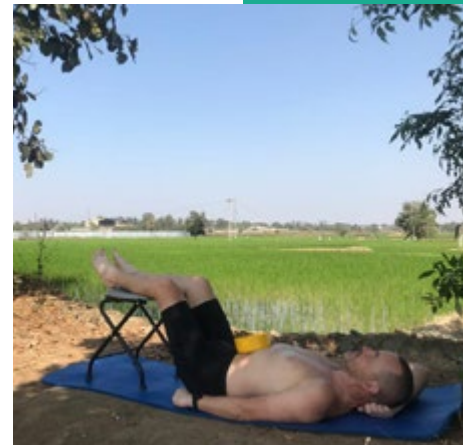
I like birds very much. I managed to see three hornbills, we saw a number of ibis, lots of cattle egrets that tend to eat around the feet of cattle. The cattle's movements disturb insects which the cattle egrets take advantage of. I also saw some wonderful roller with their turquoise underbelly and also some iridescent kingfishers. We've also seen white hawks along the way, kites, guinea fowl, small white hawk & peacocks.

**More cycle porn please** Sachin has been taking some wonderful photographs. Our joke now is that the project cycling for widows has been cancelled and it's now been turned into a cycling photography masterclass for Sachin. Our joke term for his glamour pictures is 'cycle porn' and so whenever we stop and he wants to position me and do something dramatic and interesting, we say 'oh not more cycle porn'.

**Valentines** For Valentines day I asked Atul to kindly arrange flowers for Deb, which he did, and she was very happy. I don't think she expected me to send flowers but with the help of Atul I was able to make her smile.

**Wonderful example of Jugaad** I got Pawan to take a photograph of the make do air conditioning system which involved a fan and what looked like straw. Water is apparently drizzled through the straw, cools and the cool air is blown through the fan. That was amusing, I've never seen anything like that before. A good example of Jugaad, which is term in India that refers to a frugal innovation or even a hack.

**Shout out to Sam and Molly** A big shout out to my son Sam who had some important paediatric exams today and I hope those went well Sam, lots of love to you. I want to give a shout out to Molly too as she has been selected for the Kent hockey squad. Molly you are a superstar, well done darling.



# Day 14

Sunday 16 February

## Route details

From Kamareddi

To Adilabad

Distance 1,400km

Time 4 hours 5 minutes

# I'm Keeping My Tan

Another 100km and another personal best. The conditions were just about perfect as the roads were long, straight and probably going more down than up. Most importantly, there was no head wind. So, whatever wind it was, it wasn't against me and I did four hours and four minutes. We're now travelling in the car to Adilabad for this evening.

## Destination Adilabad, Nagpur, Varanasi & Srinagar

We passed a sign today that contains four important destinations that we're arriving at. The first one is Adilabad which is where we are tonight. Nagpur is where we are on 18/19 February and then Varanasi (Day 25) where we will be visiting some of the widows that we helped last time through my fundraising. And then, finally Srinagar so that's great to have them all captured on one sign post.

**Making Puri for breakfast** I was deep-frying some puri for breakfast today in a really nice restaurant called Sri Sai Palace. The owner was a guy called Gangadhar there's a picture of me sitting on a swing with him. It's amazing as he owns this little roadside restaurant and his two sons are studying in the United States at the moment. The guy who was actually making the puri had spent some time as a driver in Jordan so his English was excellent.

**Curd churning is hard** I was curd churning today. There was a lady making buttermilk, and I did it for a little while and, my goodness, it was hard work. She was doing that for the whole hour and a half that we were there for lunch, and still it seemed little progress. The place we stopped at was actually called Hotel Aunty. Aunty, the owner, was in fact there on duty and she looked a pretty formidable lady who you wouldn't mess with. Even the great Sachin, who takes control of what I eat and how much, wasn't

able to stop her piling food onto the plate in her wonderful Indian mum type style.

**Thinking of Dad** Today I'm remembering my dad, because he passed away two years ago today. In his memory, I listened to Monsters by James Blunt. The reason I play that song is because James Blunt's father was diagnosed with a serious kidney condition and was expected to die. So the song is a little sentimental but it is a nice song. It contains the words 'I'm not your son, you're not my father. We're just two grown men saying goodbye'. And somehow it's appropriate that I'm in India at the moment because when he did pass away, I was in India and I couldn't get back in time to see him. I was in Pune but luckily, my sister Jo, was with him at the end so that was good. I did of course go back as soon as I could to help with the funeral arrangements and to speak at his funeral.

**My mum and blog comments** Sadly, my mum's not doing so well, but my sister Jo, is being a star and looks after her full-time. Jo has been showing her the blog on a daily basis. People might recall that 5 years ago, for the 30 walking marathons, she was the person that left the most comments on my blog. Unfortunately she's not well enough to leave comments this time around. I would just say that and not after adding them up that Paula and John may be pulling into an early lead on the number of comments front. I think they are closely followed by Holly and David, and I'm sure

others will have an opportunity to sneak up on the outside if they keep going strong. Thanks to everyone, their comments are super and have really helped me. I know I keep repeating myself but I read them first thing in the morning when I wake up and in the evening as they really give me a lift so please keep them coming.

**We were born in the same hospital** Talking of Paula I discovered, when we were in Mumbai for our client academy, that we were both born in the same hospital in Swansea in Wales. It was called the Mount Pleasant and I was born a few years before Paula, but that was a nice link. I've managed to lose my Welsh accent whereas Paula is still proudly carrying hers.

**Today's cycle porn** Sachin managed to slip in a bit of cycle porn today when he took a picture of me cycling down the white line. It was right at the end of the day, which he's very pleased about, as it's a nice photo.

## I'm keeping my tan when I get back

There's a picture of my legs with a classic cyclist tan, sort of just above the knee and down. It was funny because Sachin asked me where I'd be going when I got back to have my tan removed. I said he clearly didn't understand what westerners were like and that they're willing to go to any lengths to get a tan. I certainly wouldn't be getting it removed. He told me that in India there's a whole industry around removing tans.



**peterchatergmailcom**

Hi Chris, just to say I read the blog every morning, as do several of the team. We're loving seeing the stories and vistas, albeit people were a bit nervous about your safety in that video you posted the other day, turning right into a busy road! Glad you seem to be through the physical issues from last week – will keep my fingers crossed for tail/cross winds for the next few days... Take care

**Paula**

Cymru am byth! And here's an oggy, oggy, oggy shout out for the invincible cyclist xx

**Savy**

Lovely following your blog, Chris – first thing I do when I get in at work (shh!). Lovely seeing some personal photos – thanks for sharing. I of course enjoy seeing India from a different perspective – reminded me of the time I had to explain to someone at the supermarket here what Brinjal and Lady finger were, and now I need to switch back from Aubergine and Okra each time I'm back Keep strong and best wishes!

**Damien**

Chris – reads like a particularly memorable day. A great way to mark your father's passing, and no doubt he would approve of all the achievements of this day as well. I'm also with Roddy. Be sure to leave some physical and mental reserves in the tank – just in case those winds decide to turn around or the grade decides it wants to go the other way... In any case, though – keep up the great work!

**Priya**

Wow Chris! Just read some of your blogs – fascinating and inspiring on so many levels. Glad to know that you are now in a much better shape than last week (oh hate a bad tummy and to have to cycle 100km with that – gosh!) and lovely to see your parent's photos and get a glimpse into their stories... Good luck – keep cycling and writing. Love, Priya

# Day 15

Monday 17 February

## Route details

From Adilabad

To Adilabad

Distance 1,500km

Time 4 hours 37 minutes

## Focusing on 20km at a Time

I've reached a big milestone as it Day 15 and 1,500km completed but there is still 3,000km to go. That's a third done so that's good. It feels like the Cycling for Widows project is properly kicking off now. I had all the excitement, encouragement and support at the beginning so I've got to really focus on what I've got to do and just think of it as a day at a time. In fact, not even a day at a time, 20km at a time.

**I was slow today** You'll see from my stats that I was pretty slow today, and that was in part because there were some pretty big hills that just seemed to go on forever. My feet were very sore hence the reason why they were taped up, which Sachin kindly did. He's worried that some of the socks that I'm wearing aren't good enough and they're causing me some problems.

**Loving the hills!** Early on in the day, because there are so few roadside Dhabas I did a loop before breakfast. The loop involved cycling 6km up a pretty steep hill. At the top of the hill, I cycled back down it, which was lovely as I was freewheeling for most of it. Then we had breakfast and I loved the hill so much I cycled back up it again.

**More cooking today** At breakfast I did a bit of cooking again at the Pranu Punjabi Dhaba. This time we had some Paratha and it was stuffed Paratha, potato, onion and some curry powder, or some chilli powder.

**Lunch and McDowell's** At the Punjabi Dhaba for lunch, we actually had a little private dining room... almost Michelin starred. We had our meal and then on the charpoy, a sort of multi-purpose day bed that you can sit and eat on, Sachin laid out my bedding and I was able to go to sleep on it afterwards.

The only problem with my lunchtime nap was that after the team vacated, a new group of people came in. They were rather lively, and they were drinking McDowell's whisky, so things got a bit rowdy which was less than ideal.

**Monkeys trying to steal our food** We saw loads and loads of Macaque monkeys today. Some were trying to pinch our food, and I think the lady at the Dhaba had a full-time job of chasing them away. In fact Pawan was trying to chase them away, and I was trying to stop him chasing them away because I wanted Sachin to take a photo of them.

**Visiting a waterfall** After lunch today, we spotted a sign for some waterfalls so I headed in that direction. It was a relief to get off the main highway. The falls were called 'Kuntala' and, actually, it was a nice diversion although it took a while and there were 444 steps down and, of course, 444 steps back up, which probably wasn't the most sensible thing to do when I still had 25km to go. Some of the team took the steps rather better than some of the others. There wasn't too much water at the waterfall as it's the dry season. There were three young guys playing drums down at the waterfalls, and one of them let me have a go.

**Noisy home made gun** We saw a home made gun that had some gunpowder and

some water that they were selling near the top of the waterfall. They are used for scaring monkeys away. So if you're a farmer and own some trees, vegetables or fruit, these guns will frighten the monkeys away. The video of monkey gun doesn't give you any sense of the noise as it was absolutely deafening. The video, for some reason, doesn't really capture the noise very well but I can assure it was really really loud.

**Thank you for the song recommendations** I'm very grateful to people for sending me their music recommendations and I'm going to download those and add them to my playlist. So, I'm going to add them to a playlist so I can listen to them as I'm going along.

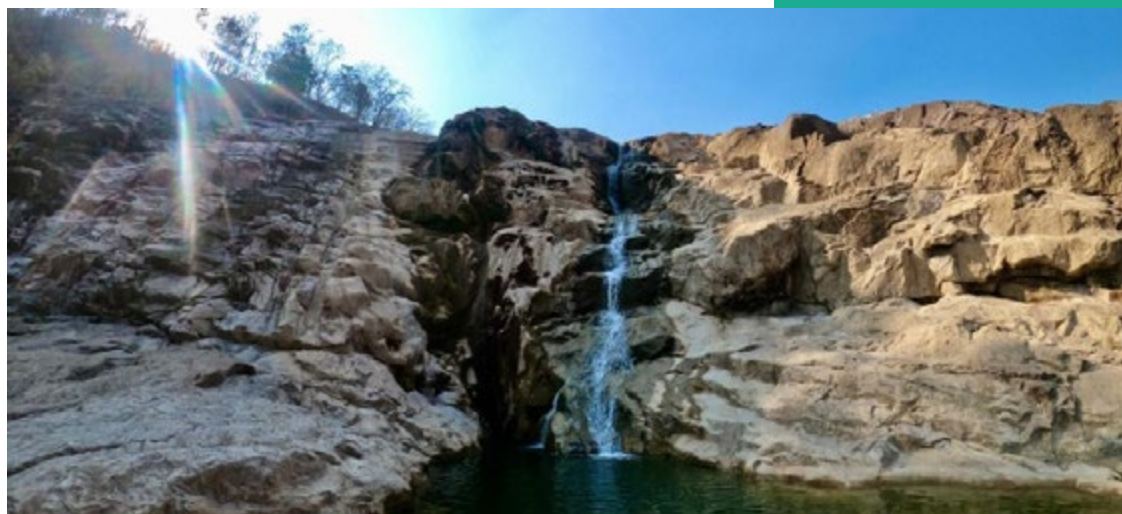
**I'm a contortionist** Sachin got me into some extraordinary contortions when doing my physio. They look painful and are painful, but they absolutely do the job. He is a very talented physio.

**All of us die but not all of us live** Today, one of the highlights of listening to Spotify was a song called Moment for life by Niki Minaj and Drake. I attended an intensive 5 week residential program at Regent's University in the summer of 2018, I think it was, in psychotherapy. One of the class tutors was amazing, and she played that song at the beginning of one of the lectures

to set the scene. The reason it was so powerful is that some of the words are, 'All of us die but not all of us live'. That really resonated with me because, as many people know, I struggled with mental health issues and alcoholism for many years. I was not really living, I was surviving, and that's not a great place to be.

**Sachin makes a promise** This is my son Ben, who is an actor and a gym instructor. Sachin has promised that when I reach Kashmir, I will look just like Ben, so I'm waiting with bated breath, although I'm not too optimistic. The other family likeness that you'll recognise is that he does things with his top off, as I do. He does, however, have a rather better reason to have his top off than I have. Today I caused some consternation with the local policeman as he who wasn't too happy that I had my top off. He had a friendly word with the team to say that some of the villagers might take offence. I once promised my wife that I would stop doing exercise, running, cycling and doing other things with my top off when I reached 50. I seemed to have failed at that so my new deadline is 60.

**Feeling tired, bye!** I don't know whether it was just the cycle or the steps at the waterfall, probably both, but I'm feeling very, very tired and sleepy now. I need some food, physio and sleep.



### Chetna Kaura

What an adventure and endurance test 1500km has been! You seem to be enjoying it though so let's look at this as 75x20km done and now only 150x20km left of this amazing experience. I really wonder how you go back to 'life as usual' after each of your extraordinary feats.

### David and Holly

Many congratulations Chris and the team on this major milestone – one third there and one third to looking like Ben!! Looking forward to the rest of your adventures.

### Nihal Joseph

Congratulations on completing one third Chris! I think you will soon be crossing in to Maharashtra. I hope you are staying away from the tiger reserve in Tipeswar – they might be harder to chase away than the monkeys!

### Anonymous

Having seen the contortions, I think you should audition for Cirque au Soleil when you get back!

### Seamus

I'm amazed to realise that you're one third of the way. Truly, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

### Damien

Fascinating to experience the highs and lows (physically and mentally) with you, Chris. Keep ticking off those 20km blocks, and keep sending through the blogs.



# Day 16

# A Day of Two Halves

Tuesday 18 February

## Route details

From Adilabad

To Nagpur

Distance 1,600km

Time 4 hours 33 minutes

It's nice to finish the day. I get into the warm embrace of the car and, in fact, today we've got 100km to go to get to our accommodation. It's a good example of why we then stay two nights and then do a loop. So, I've cycled 100km, we're driving 100km and we'll stay there tomorrow night as well. I'll do a loop of 100km and that makes up the difference. Thereafter we can travel northwards.

**Feeling rough this morning** The morning was rough, really rough. I was tired and I think it was from walking the 444 steps at the waterfall yesterday. As it was cold this morning I wore my fleece for the first 20km. The speedometer wasn't working because it wasn't set up properly and I'm too incompetent to fix it. I had to wait for Sachin to sort it out for me. And, I was just generally feeling ropey and tired.

I remember looking at myself in the mirror just before having breakfast and thinking 'Blimey, you look old and knackered. Truly old and knackered.'

**From the lows to the highs** But that said, there were some really lovely moments when I was in the flow. Again, the roads mostly were really good. These national highways are super, thankfully. There are sections that haven't been made up properly and that's a reminder of what it would be like to cycle on rough roads all the time. Frankly, I think it would at least double my cycling time and I can't begin to imagine how awful that would be. It would certainly be super punishing for my perineum.

**Making chai and grinding tobacco** I've tried my hand today at a couple of other things, I became a chaiwala (tea seller) for a time. I had a go at grinding tobacco on what looked like a classic Indian Jugaad (Indian frugal hack) machine to grind tobacco. The smell of it after is incredibly pungent.

**We are now in Maharashtra** About 20km after leaving Adilabad, we left Telangana and entered the state of Maharashtra, which is the state in which Mumbai is in. Mumbai is where I spend most of my time along with Delhi. It's the financial capital of India and the official language has changed from Telugu to Marathi.

**Health is good at the moment** The other thing I'm really, really grateful for is for my health at the moment. The two days about Bangalore is now a bit of a distant memory, but it was horrible and it shows how much we rely on our good health. I was just feeling so rough, so exhausted, and my stomach was hurting. It was just not a good time as you heard from the video I did at the time, I was almost ready to give up.

**The simple things in life** Even though I have time for thinking and for reflection, the reality is that it's pretty mundane as I just think of really simple things. If you live a simple life, which is clearly what I'm doing »



at the moment, you think of simple pleasures. I've been thinking about my bucket and mug shower. You will think this is crazy, but I've been thinking about exercising for pleasure, rather than as a job.

I'm looking forward to a couple of days in Mumbai after this is over and before I head back to the UK. I fly back from Mumbai and I'm looking forward to just running along Marine Drive for pleasure, so that may sound a little odd. And I've just been thinking about family and friends.

**Langurs used as guard dogs** As we were driving I got very excited because we saw a great big gray langur, which is a big monkey. It ran across the road holding it's baby. And, interestingly, I've seen langurs in Delhi being used as the equivalent of a guard dog. They are used to chase the smaller macaque monkeys away. So, I've seen these great big langurs on leads, which is a sight to see.

**Biryani + curd = no Biryani** Abdul, even though he only speaks a little English, is making himself known to me, either directly or through Sachin or Pawan, but it's very amusing. He was diagnosed with diabetes a little while back, and there are certain things he's not meant to eat, including rice. But he has a real weak spot for Biryani. So whenever we have Biryani, he eats lots of it and then he has convinced himself that by having some curd within 15 minutes of eating the Biryani, that it's fine. So, it's amazing what things we tell ourselves to justify having something that we're not meant to.

**Abdul the politician** The other thing about Abdul is that he is hoping to stand in some local elections when he gets back to Haryana. He's been on the phone a lot, sort of taken over from Mahadev, because he's trying to drum up support for his local election. We've all been saying to him that we hope he remembers us when he's famous, and the other drivers have been caught referring to him as Modi Shri instead of Abdul Shri.

**Thinking of Sam and Hannah** I listened to some more music today and the stand-out track was 'Fields of Gold' by Eva Cassidy. It is one the favourite tracks of my elder son, Sam and his long-term girlfriend, Hannah. Sam is a doctor and Hannah is an accounts manager for a company called Student Beans, who provide students with discounts for shops, restaurants, etc. Sam did his paediatric exams recently (last weekend) and he thought they went reasonably well. He's already requested that I take him out for dinner when I get back, which of course, I will be more than happy to do.

**Listening to Invictus** Holly and David recommended that I listen to 'Invictus' read by Morgan Freeman. Invictus being the favourite poem, apparently of Nelson Mandela, so I've just listened to it and I can see why David enjoyed it so much. David is one of my heroes and was the inspiration for my 30 marathons in 30 days because he did something that was much tougher. He walked around the south coast of England around Devon and Cornwall. He went up and down the steep cliff paths and did 25 marathons in 25 days during the winter. He

walked in the dark in the morning and in the dark in the evening, so I absolutely take my hat off to him. That's tougher than anything I've ever tried.

**Some more music suggestions please** I just wanted to thank everyone for their music suggestions, which I've taken all of them and have added them to my playlist, so I'm looking forward to enjoying them when I play my 'great songs' on shuffle. I've been listening to a guy called Vin Garbutt. It gives me nice memories of Fran and Ally, who introduced me to Vin Garbutt songs, like 'If I had a son'.

And I've also got some specialist music requests as I need three things please: great Italian love songs, great French love songs and some really lovely melodic British folk music. So those are the three specific requests for recommendations please.

**Chai with my sugar** On the Indian chai front, as before when I did the marathons, it is sort of miraculously (along with Sachin's 'magic hands') getting me through the journey. We've started to joke that there's so much sugar in Indian chai that we now ask for sugar, and then we think about whether we want to add any chai. Whether it's a couple, two or three, teaspoons of chai along with our sugar.

We've just arrived at the Oyo townhouse, which looks very nice, and Abdul's very happy, so he's singing Oyo! Oyo! Talking of Oyo, they have been brilliant with helping to manage and arrange our accommodation.

## Alan

Hi Chris – sorry for the radio silence (half term). Great to see u making good progress – love the blogs as ever. Will send some music requests separately (am not sure I have anything in the specific categories but I will try!). Keep it up!

## Anonymous

I'm sure they are already on the playlist but Dido : White Flag & Emeli Sandé : Clown must be there. I'm sure they can be translated into French and Italian

## Tom Furlong

I've been really enjoying your blog – great to read something so honest about something so hard. I cycled from lands end to John Ogroats when I finished university, and reading this has reminded me it was a very happy time. You've inspired me to do it again before I turn 40!

## Priya

Aah – the Indian Chai! I miss that. The only thing is I love it too much and can end up having gallons (of sugar!) of it as a result. So probably best I don't drink that too often in London:)

Not sure I can suggest anything for your particular song list but will drop a line with some suggestions separately. x



# Day 17

Wednesday 19 February

## Route details

From Nagpur

To Nagpur

Distance 1,700km

Time 4 hours 26 minutes

# Why I Take on Extreme Challenges

So today was, I think, probably the shortest day actually out on the road, but not a personal best. I think the time wasn't as quick because for much of the day there was a headwind, and that makes a big difference. Sachin thought I was up to doing four sessions of 25km today rather than 5 sessions of 20km and that seemed to go reasonably well. Although once you get into a pattern, changing it becomes a little difficult, and that was more of an issue with my mind rather than with my body.

**Giving my bike a lift** Poor Pawan. I think he has been struggling to direct and control me. Today was a good example where he was desperately trying to get me to turn around, drive back up the service road and back onto the main highway. I was being stubborn so I decided the quickest way up onto the highway was to pick my bike up, run up the steps and then climb over the wall.

**Driving me loopy** The days where I do a loop are not so good. Going out and then retracing my steps reminds me too much of training. There's something very powerful about progress and moving forward, so the days of the loops are less pleasurable than the days of just making 100km progress northwards.

**Missing the beauty of...** What I would say was that it was hot again and sadly, some of the beauty of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana seems to have gone. It's much more dusty, more industrial and lots more heavy lorries. In fact, there was one place where there was heavy lorries with their tires off and out of use. It looked like a place where the lorries went to die.

**Sexy Italian cycling shorts** The other very exciting news today is that Atul has arranged to send me, from Delhi, three pairs of good quality Endura cycle shorts. I'm looking forward to wearing these over the

next few days. We had, in fact, previously, arranged for some Castelli, Italian shorts, to be delivered from Delhi, which arrived a few cities back through Pawan. They were size XL because the shop said they need to be a size up.

Well, if these were extra large than I'll eat my hat because it was ridiculous. I don't know if they would have fitted Molly. And I don't think an XXXL would have fitted me. They were clearly designed for super, super slim and sexy Italian cyclists because there was no way in a million years that I was going to wear them. I could barely get one leg in them, let alone both legs and my waist.

**The fish and bones saga** I told Sachin I fancy fish this evening and he's grown to learn, as my family will testify, that I'm absolutely hopeless with bones. So I love fish but it needs to be boneless as otherwise it just retracts from the pleasure. Sachin informs the hotel accordingly and as a result they have called him at least five or six times during the course of today.

A guy's been going to the fish market, coming back and Sachin gets a call to say the fish has been filleted but there seems to be one or two small bones. Sachin says "No, that's no good" and that they need to go back to the market. So, we've had a bit

of a fish saga today so I must make sure to thank the Oyo chefs and hotel this evening.

**Beard trimming** I'm very excited today as I've been look forward to, for about the last 48 hours, going to a barbers and having my beard trimmed. Or what might loosely be termed as my beard. I've never been able to grow a beard but, what little I have, I'm looking forward to getting trimmed. It's really starting to irritate me and go in my mouth. More of those simple pleasures that I talked about in Day 16.

**Its chilly in Srinagar** Srinagar is my final destination and out of interest I asked Pawan to Google the temperature. I think it was a high of 6 or 8 degrees centigrade and a low of 2 or 3 degrees. I have to say it was a bit of a shock to find out. I haven't got the right clothes for those temperatures. I don't even cycle in those temperatures back at home in the UK, or certainly not very often. I've got a couple of winter clothes so Sachin and I have been discussing, assuming I get that far, what I will need to buy to tackle much colder temperatures.

**Reasons for fundraising & extreme challenges** I have talked previously about the reason for doing this ride and I want to share it again. For the most part, despite my challenges, I've had a pretty good life. Therefore it's only right and proper that »

## Day 17 *cont*

I should take time out to do something for other people. In particular for widows and their children, in a place that's become my second home. There are other reasons of course and one of those is because I'm an alcoholic. I have an addictive personality, so I tend to do things to excess. So, normal people would do a cycle from London to Brighton to raise money for charity. I don't seem to be very good at measuring myself in that way, so it only seemed right to me to cycle the length of India.

**Dad and looking for affirmation** And then, the final reason, perhaps the most important, is the fact that when I was young, I had a difficult relationship with my dad. He didn't always find being a dad easy and in many ways, I think he found me an irritant at best and at worst, public enemy number one. Through my role as a trustee of MQ Mental Health and through my reading more generally and through counselling, I've discovered that lack of affirmation from your father can live with you for a long time, maybe for a lifetime. There's no doubt that part of the reason I've done these big challenges is to try and find that affirmation that perhaps I didn't always have from my dad.

**Perhaps I am earning love...** There's also another reason that's related to my dad as well but I haven't talked about it much. I've been reflecting on it during the cycling. After I left home we had a much better relationship. We had a stronger relationship in many respects and I went on to form a reasonably successful career at a major international law firm. My dad recognised and appreciated what I'd achieved and it's just possible that I learned that love was

conditional on success, succeeding and doing good things.

Therefore and perhaps the other reason that I'm doing this cycling for widows as well as other previous extreme charity ventures, is that I believe that I'm earning love rather than being worthy as myself.

**My jokes aren't as funny now** Pawan's done a great job in stepping into Atul's shoes, but it's different as I thought it would be. Interestingly, I thought it would be more challenging for Sachin or maybe the drivers to suddenly have somebody new in the team. I think it's probably affected me more than anybody else because, partly, it is a communication thing. I think Pawan understands me less well than Atul and my humour isn't for everybody. I think he's bemused at my humour at times, whereas Atul seems to be on a similar wavelength. Atul regularly refers to me as Mr Bean and chuckles away when I make my silly comments.

**I'm listening to...** I spent much of today listening to 'Miss Saigon', the musical and I know that Deb would approve as she absolutely loves musicals. The stand-out track for me, and I think for Deb, is 'Bui Doi'.

**Comments and music recommendations** Please keep your comments coming. They mean a lot to me, especially in the early morning when the prospect of another 100km isn't very alluring. I need that extra help and support to get me up on my bike. And, also, please keep the song recommendations coming in. I really appreciate them and they're all being uploaded onto my playlist.





**peterchatergmailcom**

Hi Chris, Thanks for another great morning read over my oatmilk flat white! I'm off to Jordan on holiday tomorrow for 10 days, but will keep reading every day. I was delighted to set at time of 8,8 seconds over 60m at the track at the weekend. 60m – distance for me is now 200m :) Can't fathom grinding out the miles like you can, fantastic mental determination.

Not sure my mid-90s trance would be very appealing to you, I'm more into Hans Zimmer soundtracks, and other film soundtracks, I find they help me focus and can be quite moving... but might not distract from the tight shorts enough for you :)! I'll be back on the 3rd March, so you'll be on the final leg by then, no doubt. Look forward to hearing about it in person when you're back – my shout for a coffee this time (thanks again for your counsel last time). All best

**Damien**

Another big day, Chris – and obviously plenty of time for reflection out there on the bike. Thanks for sharing. Getting close to half way now. Amazing.

**Nick Bliss**

Chris, I logged onto your blog after you had WhatsApp'd the "Dulwich Collective" and really enjoying your diary. Reminds me that I must get out to India and harass Karam D-S, Pratap and co. Was wondering about your request for English folk songs. You should look up Ralph Vaughan Williams and see what you fancy from his various folk music-based compositions. It also made me think of "Scarborough Fair" and Simon and Garfunkel although their stuff may be a bit too melancholic and reflective when you are in the pedals and bashing out your daily 100km. While you are in Central India, I am heading to Central England – Wakefield; albeit I guess I should say "Northern Powerhouse" ...Good luck, Chris. Looking forward to hearing all about it – or some part of the epic – at a Pub Night.

**Matthew White**

Hi Chris, I am finally signed up to receive your blog posts! You are doing an awesome job by the look of it. It is bringing back lots of memories for me – of my own cycle odyssey from Brussels to Oslo in 2015 and also of the great times I spent in India with you. I think long-distance cycling is a mental challenge more than anything but I hope your body is holding out as well. I expect you are getting aches and pains in various places but it's great that you have a personal soigneur to look after you. The wonderful thing about cycling through a country is that you get to experience every inch of it.

So many things to see and experience. I found that planning my blog posts for the day helped pass the long hours on the bike more quickly. As did the prospect of coffee and cake when I reached my daily destination, so make sure you always have something to look forward to even if it is boneless fish! Road cycling clothes are all designed for whippet-like 18 year olds so no surprises with your shorts.

Top tip: MTB shorts are more forgiving. My favourite comment of today's blog: "my humour isn't for everybody". As for music recommendations, I ended up listening to a lot of early Genesis, which just demonstrates that cycling drives you a bit mad. Good luck for today. Allez, allez!

**Anonymous**

Good Evening Chris and team. Thank you for deciding to cycle from Kanyakumari to Kashmir in India. It counts one more mile stone establish by a Britisher in India. It will be remembered forever that one guy – Chris Parsons who took pain and cycled for uplifting the condition of impoverished widows in India. Keep it up and best of luck.

# Day 18

Thursday 20 February

## Route details

From Nagpur  
To Pench  
Distance 1,800km  
Time 4 hours 43 minutes

### James S

Keep it up Chris and team. Very much enjoying the daily updates of your adventures and achievements.

### David and Holly

Can you reroute the challenge to take in more Nature Reserves. It looks a beautiful, calm and relaxing place to cycle and I don't suppose the risks are any greater than riding amongst the lorries on the highway. We'd all enjoy the daily wildlife spotting log. Katy Perry singing Roar would be a great accompaniment and should be on anyone's inspirational playlist.

### Nicholas Peacock

Fantastic Chris. You are seeing India from so many aspects – the forest, the road works, cities, and roadside restaurants. Well done. Keep going!

### Damien

Sounds like the support crew are also really getting into a rhythm too. Great work – especially as I recall that it wasn't all plain sailing at the start. Impressive to watch (read). Also excellent to see what looked like a "Tour de India" domestique rider out there on the course with you in some of the shots. Long may all your strength and sensibility last.

# Look Out For Tigers

It's nice to get Day 18 done, edging towards the 2,000km mark and also edging towards the halfway point, so that's a nice thought.

**A mixed day** I would say it was very mixed today. It started off in a very challenging way, coming out of Nagpur and I apologise to anyone who comes from Nagpur but I obviously didn't see any of the good bits. As a result of the metro, it was as if a surgeon had taken a giant scalpel from the throat down to the pelvis and opened up the belly of Nagpur, and its guts were spilling out. It was particularly unpleasant for about the first 23km or so, which meant that I was going very slow.

**Take the rough with the smooth** And then, National Highway 44 (NH44), in that wonderful Indian way, suddenly let me down. It went from super smooth tarmac to rather more bumpy concrete. Without any warning whatsoever it turned into full scale construction with lots of heavy lorries. In the end, I couldn't cycle on it any more. We had to put the bike on the back of the car and that's when we took the turning into the nature reserve.

**The nature reserve was a nice end to the day** For the last 15km we were in the nature reserve and we had to pass some wardens. I was slightly intrigued that these wardens allowed a cyclist to go into a nature reserve where, apparently, there are leopards, tiger, bears, armadillos and large deer. We didn't see any of those animals but we did see more langurs. The end of the day was probably the nicest end of a day that I've had and it just involved a single track quality tarmac road which meandered through the forest and it was cool. There were plenty

of shade to protect me from the sun, and it was just lovely.

**I let the tigers have priority!** The nature reserve is called Pench and along the road my eyes were peeled either way because there were some wonderful signs that said 'Look out for tigers' and 'Tigers take priority in crossing'. They were certainly going to take priority with me as I wasn't going to mess with a tiger. In Kent we just have signs saying 'Deers crossing' and there is in fact many deers crossing. Sadly some of them get run over but seeing a sign for tigers was quite something.

**Wild pigs or boars** Nagpur also has more than its fair share of wild pigs. The wild pigs, here in India, that I've seen look like a cross between a domestic pig and a wild boar. Frankly they look more like a boar than a pig. They're all over the place and there are more pigs than dogs! We saw one particularly gruesome scene today where a poor dog had recently been run over on the road and a pig was eating it. So, that was quite something.

**Langurs galore** We did, luckily, see a troop of langurs which performed beautifully for us, chasing each other on the ground and climbing up the trees. In fact we saw quite a few langurs today, so that was a treat.

**The loveliest dhaba (I've come across so far)** We found a nice place for lunch. It must be the smartest dhaba in the whole of India because there were tablecloths on the tables which were clean, and it was lovely.

It was a father and daughter duo running the restaurant and the food was delicious. I particularly enjoyed the cauliflower curry which in Hindi is known as a gobi masala. Wonderful.

**Madhya Pradesh is our sixth state** We were only in Maharashtra for a short time and we've now entered Madhya Pradesh. So, this is our sixth state. We've crossed five states. So, we've been in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, and we've just entered Madhya Pradesh.

**Long drive back** Yesterday was a super early finish, getting to the hotel at 4:30pm. Today's going to be much later. The road is like some scene from an apocalyptic vision of the world where everything is just coming to an end. It's as bad as I've ever seen it. The conditions are awful. The whole of NH44 has been completely dug up, so we're travelling really slowly in the dark. We're going to be super late and Sachin says there's a whole series of flyovers being built to enable the wildlife, in particular the big cats, to travel across the land underneath. They will hopefully avoid being run over.

**My bike was the right choice** I've been on a few Indian-style bikes, either with or without trailers. For one wild moment, about two or three years ago, I thought I would do this cycling project on an old sort of Hercules Indian bike. I am so, so pleased I didn't. I think it was Nick Peacock who first said to me, "Chris, don't even think of it." And, so I'm pleased I didn't, and Professor

Timothy Endicott also said, "Chris, that's a step too far." They were absolutely right as I think it would have taken me about a year on one of those.

**A grateful bottom** I'm very grateful to Atul, so thank you very much Atul, for my three new pairs of Endura professional shorts which are beautifully padded and made a big difference today and my bottom is particularly grateful and says thanks.

**Jez's advice** I'm also reminded of my friend Jez's comment from the 30 marathons when he said, 'Try and enjoy the adventure as much as you can because soon you'll be back to day to day life.' And I have been remembering that.

**Mahadev's treat** Mahadev was excited about eating these black sugar coated things and he ordered those first before ordering the rest of his breakfast. Poor Abdul and Pawan weren't allowed to eat them because of their diabetes. I wasn't allowed to eat them because Sachin's too strict with me.

**Looking forward to Miami** I've got a treat to look forward to when I get back although I'm trying not to look too far ahead. I'm back in the office for a week and then the whole of our family plus Hannah (Sam's girlfriend) will be going off to Miami for 10 days, so that will be a special treat.

**Meanwhile, back at home** Molly, Sam and Ben in London last night, had what our family calls 'MAPN' (Movie And Pizza Night).

**Thank you** I've just read all the of the wonderful comments on yesterday's blog so thank you to everyone who left a message. I appreciate you sharing your thoughts and comments and, I really can't express enough how helpful they are.



# Feeling Sore After Falling Off My Bike

It was a near disaster today but it's all good, I think. I reached kilometre 60 and I was going along smoothly. There were some tailwinds and I guess I just lost concentration. Maybe I took my left hand off the bars and then I think I caught either a cat's eye or a stone and the bike just fell away from underneath me. I hit the road pretty hard with my knee and both my hands. My knee looks dramatic but actually it's my hands that are more painful and sore.

**The team panics** There was a bit of a drama, as you can imagine. Mahadev and Pawan were in the car behind and I was lying on the road. They were worried I was going to be run over and I've never seen Mahadev drive so fast as a great burst of fumes came out of the exhaust. They were clearly very worried as they came up to me and then Pawan immediately called Sachin to see if we needed a doctor.

**Sachin was calm** Sachin arrived and was calm and collected as you'd expect, to clean the wound up and check me over. He checked my hands and my wrists, which were pretty sore. My wrists and hands are much worse in terms of pain than my knee and he cleaned it all up. We decided not to dress it as he wanted to leave it open to the air.

**My upper body was fine** My handlebars were twisted and there were a few other scrapes on my bike, shoes and things. Sachin sorted it all out and straightened the handlebars by adjusting them with an allen key. I was extremely lucky because I had my top off and thought I had removed some of the skin off my back but it was OK, so I am a lucky boy.

**It could have been worse!** I think I'm just extremely lucky that it wasn't worse. I think when you come off a bike at around 20km an hour, it's very easy to fracture bones. I remember my colleague Clive Barnard's awful accident on the way to work where I

think he hit a pothole or maybe it was some ice. He practically removed his nose and lip. I think he was knocked unconscious and ended up in hospital, so I'm very lucky in comparison. Prior to my fall, just a few minutes earlier, I was going down a hill at 50km per hour. Had I fallen off, it would have been a different story.

**A nice touch** The whole team have been incredibly kind to me, even more supportive than usual and clearly worried about my accident. The drivers were really sweet as they bought two garlands which they presented to me at the end of the ride because they were so pleased, that despite the accident, I was able to finish the 100km.

**May all my winds be tailwinds** The cycling conditions were absolutely amazing. For the most part, the road was pretty flat and with some gentle up and downs. There was only one long hill stretch. There was the most magnificent either south westerly or south easterly wind driving me forward.

Had I not forgotten to turn my Garmin off in the restaurant at lunchtime, as I was a bit focused on my knee and hands, it would unquestionably have been a sub 4 hour 100km. I really want to break the 4 hour mark during the course of this trip so I'm little cross as the conditions could not have been more perfect. In fact, on my gravestone, one of the statements I'd like to have engraved is 'May all my winds be tailwinds.'

**Happy Shivaratri** It's the birthday of Lord Shiva today, so I wish all my Indian friends a happy day celebrating Lord Shiva's birthday.

**Scratching beneath the surface** We stayed in the Grand Rajwad and from a distance, or even relatively close up, it looks like a relatively grand Rajasthani palace. On closer inspection, however, you realise that the whole place just has a plastic facade on it and behind it is something rather less attractive. So it reminded me of many of us, and in particular myself, when I think of the difference between my outward facade and my real self.

Behind the smile lurks something heavier and darker, and something less comfortable to be with. And it's something I'm working on, trying to create a symmetry between my outward self and my inward self, my thoughts and what's in my heart.

**A peaceful start this morning** Sachin took of a nice video of with me cycling over a bridge. There was a stretch of water and a number of brightly coloured temples. It was a very peaceful setting early on. There weren't many dhabas so it was a challenge to find breakfast.

**The food inspector** We managed to capture some footage of me in the kitchen at lunchtime in a classic dhaba kitchen. It's just extraordinary and you have to see it to believe it, with the chef on the floor

making food. Sachin amusingly calls me the food inspector. I'm not sure that the food inspector will be handing out too many Michelin stars.

**Jugaad at work** We managed to find a good example of jugaad in the place where we stopped for lunch. It's an extraordinary contraption that has string, knots, a box and weights in the box, all just to keep a door open. I'm sure they could have found an easier solution, but there we go. Indian jugaad.

**I'm officially 60 years old** I'm now officially 60, apparently. The team, whenever they're asked how old I am, have decided that they're just going to say 60. It's one of the first questions people ask after asking how much the bike cost. I'm worried that by the time we get to Srinagar I'll have become 70. I finally gave in today, so when I was asked for the umpteenth time how old I was, I just said 60. So, there you have it. I have officially lost two years of my life.

**Matthew's fantastic achievement** Also, from the comments yesterday, I was very pleased to be reminded by Matthew White of his great cycle from Brussels to Oslo, which was an amazing achievement. He did it unsupported and produced an amazing book afterwards.

**Feeling human again** I'm back at the hotel. I've had a shower and I'm feeling almost



human again. My knee and shin really aren't a problem at all. I hope it's just superficial but my hands and my wrists are very very sore. I can't seem to be able to undo my tops. I'm dreading putting them on the bars tomorrow morning but no doubt Sachin will have a look at them to do what he can.

Sachin has cleaned my leg up and its looking pretty good now. He has checked and double checked my hands and wrists, and he's petty sure it's only soft tissue damage. There's nothing we can do about that other than ice treatment and rest. Rest is a challenge of course because I've got to keep my hands on the bars all day, but he's satisfied there's no further damage other than soft tissue damage.



## Day 19

Friday 21 February

### Route details

From Seoni

To Jabalpur

Distance 1,900km

Time 4 hours 10 minutes



### Priya

Be safe Chris – sorry to hear about your fall and the injuries. Really liked reading your observations on 'Scratching beneath the surface' – love your analogy – and find it true for most living beings:)

### Damien

Impressive that you're still committed to sharing your daily trials and tribulations with us despite what is obviously a bit of a shake physically and mentally. I have no doubt that you will soldier on and that this will be another chapter in what is already an amazing story – but please do keep a focus on the "job at hand". Steady as she goes, Chris. Still lots of India for you (and us!) to see.

### Matthew White

Thanks Chris! Very glad you are safe after your spill. A bit of road rash will soon heal. But I hope it encourages you to keep your top on, for your sake and also for everyone looking at your photos!

### Roddy

Hi Chris. Hope you are managing the cycling without too much pain from the accident today. Keep your eyes on the road and keep pointing the bike North and we all look forward to having you back with us in one piece- physically and mentally. Lots of Love

### Mark

Get back on the horse that threw you, as the saying goes. Great work!



# Feels Good Reaching 2,000km

Day 20 is done and wow, what a relief. That's 2,000km. That's a milestone and maybe the furthest I've ever cycled on consecutive days. It's probably equal to the distance I cycled in 2011 for widows and their children for the Loomba Foundation when I cycled from London to Gibraltar, so it feels good to have done it.

**It feels good because of my injuries** It especially feels good to have done it while my knee is hurt although it's just a graze and some swelling but my wrists and hands have been in pain. To use the wonderful Indian phrase, my wrists and hands have been 'paining' today and I've just been trying to keep my weight off them while cycling. I've found it easier to cycle with my hands on the hoods (on the top of the brakes) rather than on the bars, which are in front of you or on the drops on the drop handle bars.

**A foggy start to the day** It was foggy this morning which reminded me of Kent so that was a bit of a shock after all the blue sky and sunshine we've had. It was foggy and cold, and I had my fleece on. It was a reminder that as we travel further north, the weather is definitely going to get more challenging. I've messaged Atul with some requests for different clothing.

**Another loop** It was a challenge because it was another loop day. The original plan was that we would head up some country roads and do some exploring. As a result of my fall I wanted smooth roads so we basically went back up NH 44 towards Kanyakumari and then after 50km we turned round to come back again.

**No rest for me, thanks Sachin** Good old Sachin obviously decided that I hadn't quite

done enough exercise for one day so we (Sachin, Pawan and I) have just done a 15 minute session of upper body exercises. Luckily for me, he went fairly easy on me because my wrists are not so good.

**A good team meeting** We had a team meeting today and the main topics we covered were me taking my shirt off in relation to cultural sensitivities. We talked again about the difficulty of a new member fitting into the group and I explained that Sachin and I had formed a strong bond.

Given all of the time that we spend together with the physio and advice, it's good of course but it can sometimes be bad for the team. An exclusive bond like that can exclude other people and I was very mindful of Pawan in particular in that context.

**Carrying my bike and give me some space** We also talked about the subject of the team wanting the best for me and two topics came up. One was me carrying my bike up the steps with my cycle shoes on. Pawan had been unhappy about it because he thought it was dangerous as I could have fallen. Also Mahadev likes to drive closely behind me to protect me whereas I need more space as I didn't want the sense of being pressured by the car. I want a feeling of being out in the open countryside, so we talked about compromises in that context. »

# Day 20

Saturday 22 February

## Route details

From Jabalpur  
To Jabalpur  
Distance 2,000km  
Time 4 hours 29 minutes

### Hemant Kumar

Good morning Chris and team!!  
Congratulations for completing 2,000km milestone even after your injuries. As Lord Loomba said in his message it is the kindness shower of Lord Shiva. Keep it up and good luck.

### Siew Boon Lou

Congratulations Chris for finishing 2,000km.

### Damien

Well done for getting back out there, Chris. Sounds like the team is keeping a close eye on you, so you're in good hands. And 2,000km, huh? When you think about it... that's already a really long way!

### David and Holly

Congratulations Chris and the team. Another great milestone. David and Holly x

### Anonymous

Dear Chris, Came to know about your felling off from your bike yesterday and saw your grazed knee. Worried about you. Was glad to know that you its not serious or harmful injury. I pray to god for your safe travel. Looking forward to catching up. Best Rishi.

## Day 20 *cont*

### The team is working well together

Everyone shared their thoughts but overall we felt that we were working well as a team. I was really pleased that we had the meeting to share some stuff, particularly around the cultural sensitivities. Deb had actually said to me last night, having read Pawan's comment on my blog from one or two days ago, that she felt sorry for him. He's coming into the team trying to fit in and I'm not being as compliant as perhaps I should be. I mentioned it to Pawan and said that Deb was very sympathetic to him and less so with me.

**Sachin is my like my wife** I told Pawan that Sachin was a little bit like Deb in the sense that he knew what was going on. He was calling the shots and running the show in many respects, just like Deb runs the show at home. In the same way that I find it difficult to fit in at home, not quite knowing what to do, it seems like I'm not doing the right thing. It must be difficult for Pawan to fit into the team and to work constructively with Sachin. I drew that comparison, which I hope the team found helpful. I don't know if Deb will approve, anyway, we'll see.

**Three faiths working together** See below for a lovely message I received from Lord Loomba. It reminded me of something I've been reflecting on during the trip. We have three faiths represented on this trip. There's Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, and we're all working towards the same goal. The goal is to complete this cycling in support of the fundraising I'm doing for the Loomba Foundation to support widows and their children in Jammu and Kashmir. Inevitably, it's also got me thinking about faith more generally and the reality is that, of the

three faiths represented, only one of them or none of them to be true because the faiths themselves don't allow for a different interpretation.

Dear Chris,

I was shocked to read that you fell off your bike today, even more to see your grazed knee. However, it was a great relief that you did not sustain serious and harmful injury. I feel that Lord Shiva came to your rescue because you are doing some good work to take care of so many helpless widows and their children. I am quite convinced about it as Lord Shiva is the creator of the world and humanity. The Lord has saved you as this incidence could have been heart breaking.

Veena and I have prayed to Lord Shiva for your health today. Lots of good wishes.

Lord Loomba CBE

**Pair of shoes thrown over electricity wire** I saw what I thought was some prank by kids as some shoes had some shoelaces tied together and thrown over some electricity wire. Of course, in incredible India, the story is rather different. Whether it's faith or superstition, the reason for the shoes being there was to effectively ward away bad luck. Its similar to when we use the expression 'Don't tempt fate.' So the place where we had breakfast looked lovely, as there were tablecloths on the table, and the kitchens were beautifully clean. The shoes, which are meant to represent ugliness, were to balance out the beauty. In other words, it's like saying 'It's a miracle I haven't had an accident yet'. That's tempting fate so of course you have an accident, so the shoes are there to counter that possibility.

So, as they say, either through a notion of superstition or faith that is why they were there. It's fascinating for me because I've seen many shoes on lines before and always assumed it was some prank. There's a photo of me that Sachin took at the back of a tea shop that we stopped at 90km with a lovely mum and son. The mum was called Gulab Bai and the son was called Sanjay and you can see their beautiful house behind the tea shop in blue and yellow and with a hand pump for water from a borehole at the front.

### Thinking of (and cycling to) Bhopal

There was also a sign for Bhopal, which was the scene of the terrible gas leakage that occurred in the mid 1980s. Bhopal is the capital of Madhya Pradesh and it was pretty much this time last year that I was at the National Law School in Bhopal with Professor Timothy Endicott, teaching our annual international lecture programme, so that was a nice memory. I told Pawan that I knew a nice chai shop in Bhopal, overlooking one of the lakes, because it's known as the city of lakes. I said if we can cycle there I will take him to this nice tea shop. Pawan is still struggling with my stupid sense of humour. He thought I was being literal and said it was about 400km away so it would be difficult for us to go to there.

**Searching for the bathroom switch** I spent five minutes searching for the lights in the bathroom. First of all, switching all the lights on in the bathroom had no effect. Then I scoured my room and turned all the lights on in the room and that had no effect. I then went to find somebody from the hotel to help me and, of course, stupid me, I hadn't looked next to the buzzer outside my room. The light switch for the bathroom was next

to the buzzer outside my room.

**Beautiful flowers** Sachin put together a nice collage of three different sets of flowers that he photographed today. On the left are cardamom flowers, the flowers in the middle are marigolds and the flowers on the right are chrysanthemums.

**A (too) long chai stop** It was a long day today. We got slightly carried away as we were chatting at the chai stop at 90km. By the time we looked at our watches, we realised that it was quarter past five and it would be dark within half an hour. I had to leap on my bike and I finished the 2,000km just as the sun was coming down to set.

**Thinking of Ed & his 12 egg omelette** My son Ed is doing his post graduate degree in medicine at Warwick university and he joined me on the last four and a half marathons when I walked from Mumbai to Bangalore in 2015. He ordered a 12 egg omelette but it didn't come quite as Ed had expected. We always joke and laugh about his 12 egg omelette.

**My playlist is growing!** I'm really grateful to everyone a) for their comments and b) for their song recommendations, through the comments on the blog, and through separate messages direct to me. My list of great songs has now surged from 60 to over 100 and I'm really enjoying listening to them. Today I've been listening to Ellie Goulding – 'How long will I love you', Will Young – 'Leave right now' and also, one of the new introductions from Sam, my older son, Emily Burns with her song 'Is it just me?'. Please keep the recommendations coming, and your comments of course.



# Day 21

# Thinking of Las Vegas

Sunday 23 February

## Route details

From Jabalpur  
To Katni  
Distance 2,100km  
Time 4 hours 22 minutes

**The temperature has really changed** The weather has really changed as it's much cooler in the mornings and it was foggy again at the start of the day. I had my fleece on again and this evening it was cloudy, it almost seemed to be dusk coming. So that's a reminder that I have travelled over 2,000km north and I'm rather missing the warmth and blue skies of southern India.

**I'm recovering well and going for a PB** Sachin's done a great job on my knee, leg and also on my wrists. They're all sore but they're definitely on the mend. That is a reminder of how quickly the body can repair itself, particularly when you take lots of protein. It's just miraculous, given that I'm using all those parts so much. He said I might need to rest them but they all seem to be recovering well.

Sachin announced this afternoon that I could try for a personal best tomorrow, but we'll have to see. I think it will depend a lot on the roads and on the wind but, subject to that, I'm happy to give that a crack, so we'll see.

**The big news today occurred miles away** The big news for today is not here in India, but it is many many miles west of here in Las Vegas where Tyson Fury put on the fight of the decade to beat Deontay Wilder for the

The route was pretty flat today. The first 20km were pretty horrible as I felt down and a bit flat. It was just 'hard yards' as the straight roads kept going on and on. It was the beginning of the day, it was cold and I didn't have my music. It felt just like the little man that appeared on my shoulder when I did my marathons, hinting and telling me it was too much, maybe I wasn't up to it. Maybe I should call it a day. Luckily I got through that and after breakfast and the famous Indian chai, I was feeling much better.

world championship, and to line up now a fight between himself and Anthony Joshua. So, that's a great result and I was very lucky because during my 40km break, Pawan was able to get live blogging and I was able to follow the fight live before we moved on. I heard the result in the seventh round so I was a very very happy man. A large crowd of Indians came to watch me have my physio and they seemed very bemused that I was excited by a boxing match.

My joy of boxing comes from the fact that it is the ultimate competition between two people, as there's nowhere to hide. I enjoy the skill, the excitement and I have shared some of that passion with my boys. I know it's not for everyone and I don't like it of course when someone gets hurt but I do enjoy the ultimate sportsmanship of it and the extraordinary skill and training that goes into it. Ed my youngest son who loves watching boxing with me managed to find the Fury Wilder fight and sent that through to me which I enjoyed watching.

**We saw our first mongoose today** We also saw our first mongoose today. In fact, Pawan tells me there were three mongeese and I just saw the one, which was very exciting. It was a reminder of how much I enjoy and like snakes, and one day I would

love to do a holiday just tracking snakes. I've heard about one where you can track King Cobras in India, where these magnificent snakes can reach their bodies, rise up using the muscles in their bodies until they're 6 foot tall and can open their hoods. That must be the most extraordinary sight and I would love to see it.

**I am no ordinary person!** We had some problems checking into the hotel this evening. I think there's been some miscommunication or lack of communication between Oyo headquarters and the hotel. It has mostly been working brilliantly and I'm obviously very grateful to Oyo.

There was a funny moment as the manager on duty told us we couldn't go to our rooms until the issue was sorted out. Pawan told him I wasn't any old ordinary person so waiting wasn't ideal. He was effectively saying that I had been cycling all day and that I needed to get to my room to have a shower. I'm sure my family will be amused at hearing that 'I can't wait like a normal person'.

**An extra potty portion** Today was a day of two new phrases which I enjoyed enormously. One arose because Mahadev was late and I was asking Sachin, I said 'Where is he?', I said 'We're all ready to go'.

We were all ready to set off first thing in the morning from the hotel and Mahadev wasn't there, and in the end Sachin said, "Maybe he needed a second portion of potty." I have to say, my sons would've used rather more vulgar language. I thought that was very sweet and I'm sure Deb would approve.

The other lovely phrase I heard was from Abdul, who says that his favourite chai is when 'the milk comes straight from the breast of a buffalo', which I also loved. I have repeated both of those phrases regularly today, as you can imagine.

**On the playlist today** For my great songs today, I have enjoyed 'Clown' by Emeli Sandé, 'Aitcha' by Khaled, which was recommended by David and Kaz, and also 'Black' by Dave, which was a sensation at the Brit Awards, and which Sam had recommended to me. My playlist has now swelled to 144 songs after all the recommendations I have received and I'm enjoying listening to them all.

**Abdul is aiming to be President** Abdul was telling me about the election that he's involved in. It's an election to become the President of the panchayat, which is like the village council. I am very confident that he will be a successful and wise President,



and it's an appointment for five years. I will certainly follow his progress with interest to see if he's elected in the autumn. He tells me there are two other people standing in the election but at the moment it looks as if he's the favourite candidate.

**The 20 coffees a day feeling** I've been thinking about how lucky I am to be able to do something like this and to have the amazing support that I've got, and I certainly wouldn't be able to do it without Sachin, Pawan, Atul, Abdul and Mahadev. I've been thinking about what happened at the end of the 30 marathons as it took me about six weeks to get over it.

After the marathon it felt like I had 20 coffees a day as my body was absolutely buzzing. It kept on producing loads of adrenaline thinking that I was about to put it through another day of marathons. This time round it will be thinking I'm about to do another 100km.

**Depression after 2015 marathons** A few months after I finished the 30 marathons in 2015 I ended up with depression. I had to deal with the highs of training for a year, fundraising, raising the profile of the Loomba Foundation, and then finishing the ride. So I need to be very mindful of that.



**Paula**

You are a knockout. Stay frosty!

**Helen Card**

Chris you are doing brilliantly and I look forward to reading your blog each morning. Last time you did one of these challenges I was recovering from a c-section, this time recovering from another operation. I hope the 2 aren't linked as I don't want to go under the knife if you do anything again!!

I had been wondering if you have seen any snakes. Whilst I don't have a music recommendation, you need to watch 'Snakes in the city' when you get home. It's about a guy who rescues snakes from people's homes in South Africa.

**David and Holly**

Three weeks straight with a few minor hiccups no disasters and still bang on track. What a great result. If the team are expecting PB's you must be feeling good and they obviously have faith in you. A great way to stay motivated in the middle section where the daily slog with the end still far away can feel very draining. Has Sachin got a target time in mind? We'll be cheering from the distant sidelines.

**Gavin D**

Chris, delighted to hear you're getting back to full strength after your spill. Also great to read how *Chai Defeats The Little Man on the Shoulder!* Your previous correspondent beat me to my top recommendation – the theme from the *Detectorists* (which is the most lovely, gentle character driven pastoral TV comedy if you haven't seen it). So can I give you instead Nick Drake, if you don't already know him. Any of the following songs are a good entry point to this great artist from the early 70s: pink moon, man in a shed, one of these things first, northern sky. But all three of his albums are a good listen. Have a great day tomorrow! All best, Gavin

# Day 22

Monday 24 February

## Route details

From Katni

To Rewa

Distance 2,300km

Time 4 hours 12 minutes

### Paula

Feeling good and looking good... apart from that very sore looking graze.

Onwards and upwards to that half way mark! Greetings from San Francisco xx

### Matthew White

Well done on reaching the half way mark, Chris. It is compulsory to listen to "Livin' on a Prayer" by Bon Jovi to mark this milestone. And you have to sing it at full volume like a real rockstar.

### David and Holly

We so hope you get the Donald to come cycling with you; sadly he wouldn't come out with us when we were in Rome at the same time so hoping he'll spare some time with you and the gang. Exciting times coming up to the half way point; well done team.

### Damien

Great to read/see that your machine is getting some physio attention too, Chris. It has helped bring you this far and has to help get you the rest of the way, so make sure you pay good attention to its needs too! Not so great to read about the brakes...but agreed that all should be fine if you just keep applying them in unison rather than trying to remember which is which. No more OTBs allowed on this mission!

# Going Down Memory Lane

I'm really pleased that another day is done. I'm really close to the halfway mark after reaching 2,200km today. Tomorrow I will be exactly at the halfway mark so that will be certainly something to celebrate.

The start of the day was pretty grim again so for the first 20-25 kilometres it was foggy and misty. There was water dripping from my helmet and off my fleece which rather than being sweat was actually mist and fog.

Today we travelled from Kutni to Rewa and the road was pretty flat. If anything there was just a little bit of elevation but it was largely pretty flat. The winds were a bit mixed but they were mainly crosswinds and I'll take a crosswind over a head wind any day, and of course I would prefer a tail wind.

**Working towards a personal best** Sachin's plan for me today was to do four sessions of 25km, rather than five sessions of 20km. The variation on the theme was that the last 5km of each 25km section should be done at around 70% to 80% effort. So I pushed reasonably hard for 5km on each session (so that is 20km in total) which is why my time today was good at 4 hours 12 minutes. Not a personal best but not far off.

**The medic room update** My knee is scabbing over nicely and recovering well. It's just a bit sore when I set off after a break and it's obviously sore to kneel on but otherwise, it's pretty good. My wrists and hands are still 'paining'. When Sachin last looked at my bottom he said it had developed an indent on both sides. When people used pens more often (we use computers, phones and other devices more these days) we used to get a mark on our finger from using the pen so much.

Apparently my bottom now has a saddle mark from sitting on it for so long.

**I don't want to tempt fate...** Pretty much always with lunch and dinner we'll have a salad plate and there was particularly nice example of one of those at our lunch today. A bit of a salad tower and it was really delicious. I know that some people, foreigners usually, tend not to eat things in India that aren't cooked and I don't want to tempt fate but it seems like my constitution over the 15 years I've been coming to India has grown a little stronger than some people.

**Taking a detour via Varanasi** The National Highway 44 (NH 44) would have generally been the most direct route to reach Kashmir but because we're going to Varanasi, we've taken a turning off to the east. Therefore, we are now on NH 30 en route of course where we're planning to meet up with a number of the widows that benefited from the funds I was fortunate to raise money for last time. The Loomba Foundation used those funds to train and then buy Singer sewing machines for widows to enable them to earn a living for them and their families in Varanasi.

**Lots of memories today fuelled by music** Today in many respects was a day of memories. Memories triggered by music. I started with Dionne Warwick, with songs like 'I'll Never Love This Way Again'. The memory this time was of time spent

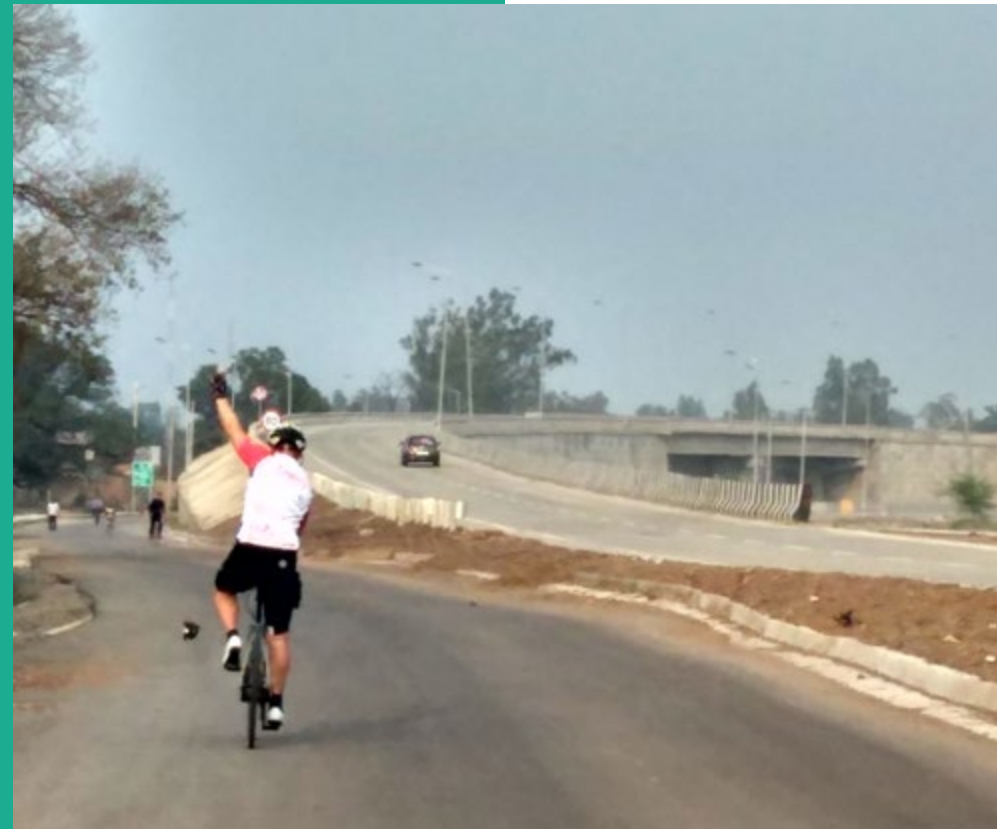
studying in my bedroom (a place where I felt most safe) during my time at home in Coleford in the Forest of Dean.

**My first teenage party** It also reminded me of my first teenage party in 1979 at the home of Theresa Cooke. A party where I was first introduced to alcohol and it didn't bode well because I drank to excess. In fact I recall drinking to excess pretty much before anyone else had arrived. Perhaps therein lay the seeds of my later problems because that seemed in some ways to be the answer. It took away my cares, anxiety, stresses and worries.

**Being ill and then ill again** Theresa lived in the old manse attached to the church, so the parsonage basically next to the church. I recall being rather ill (vomiting) in the churchyard rather early into the party. When her parents came to know that I wasn't well, we couldn't tell them that I had already been ill. They decided that I needed to be ill to make me feel better. I can still vividly remember them handing me a pint of warm water with salt in it. I then sat on the sofa between Theresa's parents, Mr and Mrs Cooke, watching Match of the Day being intermittently sick. As I say not a great sign and my parents weren't too pleased when I was driven home by the Cookes.

**Ain't no mountain high enough** The next memory was brought on by Diana Ross singing 'Ain't no Mountain High Enough'. The memories were of gay abandon in 1986-87 »





in Hong Kong driving back from a night out in Kowloon back to Hong Kong Island, where I lived with the two Nigels. I was standing up right in the back of the car with my head through the sun roof singing 'Ain't no Mountain High Enough' at the top of my voice. That also didn't bode too well.

There were also nice memories of Paul Kirkby from Honk Kong. I'm also still very much in touch with him and he acts as one of my wise counsel, so whenever I have challenges I often talk to Paul about them. He is a wise and sensible man.

**'Top of the World' in Saint Lucia** And then the final memory came from The Carpenters 'Top of the World' song. In 2018 we went on an amazing trip to Saint Lucia with friends to celebrate the birthday of Andrew War. We played a Desert Island Discs game while there and the song that won the song of the holiday was Catrin's choice of 'Top Of The World' by The Carpenters.

**Delicious fruit salad** There's also a picture of the wonderful fruit salad that Sachin makes for me at one of the breaks I had post breakfast and before lunch. The fruit salad includes, apple, banana, date, two different lots of raisins, walnuts, almonds, dried apricot, and also orange. I think that was all of them, but anyway, it's absolutely delicious and I really look forward to eating it.

**Chai is my fuel** Along with Sachin's physio and the fantastic efforts of the team that I've got helping me, the one stand out thing that keeps me going day after day is Indian chai.

**Barbers in the sky** There was also a fun picture of a barbers, elevated high up and

rather precarious to reach as there are metal steps going up. There's no barrier so you feel you can fall off at any time. The reason it was high up as Pawan explained is that it's next to a dhaba and it was important that it's high so drivers can see it when speeding by.

**Citric dhaba odours** I've talked about simple pleasures before and some things are just simple and not pleasures. I have become something of a connoisseur of dhaba latrines which is not necessarily something you want to become a connoisseur of. Most of them have special citrus odours that will linger long in the memory.

**Where are my front brakes?** Sachin was horrified recently when he saw me lifting the wheels of my bike up and using the brakes. He said: "what on earth are you doing?" I told him I was checking which is the front and back brake. I said it was because I realised they are the other way round to how they are in the UK. He was horrified that after 20 days I still wasn't clear which is the front and back brake.

It's a bit of a problem because if you apply the front brake too hard, it can skid away from you and you can go over the handlebars or fall off. You're meant to apply more pressure to the back brake and I'm still not 100% sure! Anyway I seem to apply pressure to both of them equally and hope that's alright.

I've just checked with Sachin and the back brake is on the right whereas in the UK, the front brake is there. I'm sure I'm going to be confused until the end of the ride so I need to be careful.

**Physio on my bike and me next!** Sachin did a physio session on my bike today, where he dusted the chain down and then applied some dry lube. In the photo Sachin is dealing with my bike and I'm waiting for my physio.

**Preparing for colder/wetter weather** Good old Atul in Delhi has been trying to source various winter clothes for me because it's clear that I'm certainly going to need them as I travel further North. I've heard it's been raining in Delhi so that was certainly not something I had planned for.

**Trump and Taj Mahal memories** I'm actually watching President Trump at the Taj Mahal which I once visited with Deb and the boys, and I remember it was one of those great wonders of the world that doesn't disappoint. We were very fortunate to stay in one of the Oberoi hotels where all of the bedrooms had views of the Taj Mahal albeit from a bit of a distance. I remember how excited Deb was and she sat on the bed and called her mum to tell her she was looking out of the window, describing the view of the Taj Mahal, and that was pretty special.

Maybe if I cycle quickly and get further North in India President Trump could join me for a few kilometres on my bike ride. That would be nice.

**Thank you UPL** I just to thank UPL for their fantastic support throughout this trip. They supplied a car, driver and paid for the fuel costs too. It has been a tremendous help so far as you can imagine as the car carries our equipment and our team of course. Thank you UPL.

# Day 23

Tuesday 25 February

## Route details

From Rewa

To Rewa

Distance 2,300km

Time 4 hours 30 minutes

# A Challenging Day Ends Beautifully

I had a taste of proper exhaustion today. I guess it was probably after I pushed myself yesterday and I didn't sleep well last night. So today was tough and it's always a sign that things aren't well when I keep looking at my watch to see how far there is to go. I felt like I was looking at my watch for most of today.

**Reaching half way mark on dangerous roads** Clearly the good news is that I've now passed the half way mark which is fantastic so now I'm at 2,300km and it was another day of a loop. In fact we seemed to go all over the place and I'm not quite sure where we ended up in the end. That makes it difficult as well and some of the roads were really dangerous. The traffic was fast with lorries overtaking on relatively narrow roads so I wanted Mahedev to drive really close to protect me.

**Sachin and I went on an adventure** This morning Sachin and I set off on our own to do a 25km loop before coming back to the hotel before breakfast. We set off without the cars and it was a real adventure. First of all, I've seen a lot of slums in India but the one we saw today didn't compare with any of the others. In fact I have visited Dharavi which is in Mumbai and it's one of the biggest slums in Asia. It was actually used for the film, Slumdog Millionaire.

**Thinking of becoming vegetarian** Later on in our travels that morning, Sachin and I discovered some other families that were living on the side of the road and they seemed very excited. The reason for their excitement was that one of these giant boar/pig animals that live wild in the cities of India had according to them, died of some disease. It looked like it had been run over to me but they insisted that it had died of a disease. We took the decision of not taking a photograph to save you the pain of looking

at this animal. From what we could tell they had cut it open to allow its guts to come out and then they were burning all of the hair off the back of it with rubber. They were then going to cut it into pieces and sell it. I've been thinking of becoming a vegetarian along with Deb and that thought came to mind as it was not a pretty sight.

**Abdul and the man in his underpants** We took lunch after 70km and I was really ready to collapse at that stage. At this stop Abdul started speaking to somebody who was about to have a bath and he was there in his underpants. He was telling this gentleman about the work of the Loomba Foundation and the Cycling for Widows project.

I'm going to recommend to Lord Loomba that Abdul is adopted as an ambassador for the Loomba Foundation as he finds any opportunity to brief people about the cause. Quite what the man in the underpants was thinking I'm not sure as all he really wanted to do was have his bath.

**Reminding myself what the human body can do** The last 30km today after lunch were a real slog and so it was good to finish. I have to remind myself that when I did the 30 marathons things were really tough around the half way mark. I remember wanting to give up last time. As Ed my youngest son would say, I have to just remember what the human body can do. I need to dig deep and remember that the bad days will pass.

**4,300km or 4,500km?** The other slightly shocking news was that I suddenly had a thought that I needed to double check the date of arrival by looking at our Cycle for Widows brochure. It says I'm setting off on the 3rd of February and arriving on the 16th March. I thought that doesn't seem right and when you work it out it's only 43 days. So the current plan has me arriving in Srinagar on Day 43 which would be 4,300km and that clearly isn't right. Therefore the first thing I did this morning was to message the team asking if I had misunderstood something.

Sadly they all agreed that there had been a mix up. When HV Kumar, who originally organised the trip planned it, I think he included all of February which is 29 days and then added the 16 days of March, adding up to 45. We set off on 3rd of February of course so now we need to build in a couple of further days. This means I'm going to arrive on Wednesday 18th March rather than Monday the 16th March. That has an impact on my remaining days in India as I was keen to spend at least two days in Mumbai before I fly home just to get over the cycling. So my plan now is to fly home on Monday rather than on Saturday. Lord Loomba and the Loomba Foundation will now be organising a reception for me in Srinagar on Thursday 19th March rather than Tuesday 17th March.

**From a trickle to a real waterfall** Ever since we saw the waterfall on Day 15, or the lack of a waterfall I should say, we haven't »





heard the last of it from Abdul. He was unhappy about the physical effort of going to see what he described as some trickle of water as we had to walk 444 steps down to and 444 steps back up.

So it was a real treat today to be told that just 300 yards from where we had lunch there was an interesting waterfall. I have to say my expectations were rock bottom as I think everyone else's were but we had been told by the guy in the restaurant that it was worth seeing. Anyway so we went over and it was absolutely magnificent as it was a truly spectacular waterfall.

**It's cold in Srinagar (Kashmir)** When I got up this morning it was about 13 degrees in Rewa. For some reason I decided to click on the weather in Srinagar and the temperature was one degree. I really can't help but think that I was unprepared for this. It seems a massive oversight on my part a combination of bad weather and its gonna be icy and very hilly. Part of Sachin pushing me yesterday was to make sure that I'm going to be fit enough to climb the mountains when we get to Kashmir.

**I was in the 'red' zone today** Ed has just taken a look at my heart rate from my Garmin stats. I'm not sure whether it was working properly but if it was it certainly indicates that its consistent with my exhaustion and needing to really dig deep and push.

Normally I cycle between Zones 1 and 2 and just occasionally going into Zone 3 or part of Zone 3, and today my heart seems to have been in Zone 5 for quite a bit of the day so that doesn't bode well. According to Garmin Zone 5 is described as: 'Perceived exertion: Sprinting pace, unsustainable for long period of time, labored breathing'.

**Big hearts versus small hearts** Lunch today was in a resort, which looked quite nice and there was lots of land around so it looked perfect for sleeping. The manager or the guy who was serving us told us to order some food and we could discuss sleeping after. Once we'd eaten he just said nope you can't sleep here and we were all pretty upset about it. Pawan had a nice phrase for it. He said in the poor small dhabas (roadside cafe/restaurant) their hearts were big and in the richer bigger places their hearts are small. That seems to be right actually and we've seen other examples of that too.

**A beautiful (dead) jackal** As I was cycling along today, there were plenty of dogs that had met their ends on the roads. I cycled past one going quite fast and thought that's not a dog, what can it be? Anyway when I caught up with Sachin I said I'm pretty sure that the animal back there is not a dog, can you please go and photograph it as I think it might be a jackal? When he came back with the photograph there it was, a bushy beautiful jackal with a short tail and it just looked gorgeous. In fact when I did the return loop I cycled back past it so I got off my bike to look at it and it's such a beautiful animal.

**Baba is garam today** I'm a bit grumpy today. I remember when I did the marathons that I was referred to as 'baba' and they would sometimes say 'baba' is 'garam'. 'Garam' means red which is the equivalent to saying 'baba' is angry or they will say 'baba' is grumpy or 'baba is tired'. So I'm seriously unhappy as I've got no hot water so I'm just storming around my room. As usual I go to Sachin to rescue me and he calls the guy up from reception to explain. Sachin is told that he has to turn on the geyser in his bedroom for the hot water to work in my bedroom.

That is why I didn't have hot water because my geyser was switched on but his wasn't. India is a country in which you need to be patient.

Sachin, bless him, has worked out that I was about to snap, and magic'd up a bucket of hot water from somewhere. I'm now about to go to have my favourite bucket and mug shower so he's been a life saver as usual.

**Nice meal and a little treat too** We went out and had a very a nice meal this evening. Sachin was very sweet as he ordered something nice for me. He let me have some butterscotch ice cream at the end as a celebration for reaching the half way mark. He stood up and gave me a big clap and round of applause. He shook my hand too so that was nice.

**A bit of pampering goes a long way** I went to the barber to be clean shaven and it was a nice feeling. One more of life's small pleasures on this otherwise challenging project. Mahadev is going to give me an Indian head massage with oil this evening as a well done for reaching the half way mark. The whole team have been very kind and I'm very grateful.

Just when you think life can get no better Pawan and Mahadev managed to find me some Listerine (mouth wash) from a pharmacist. I love to use Listerine after I've cleaned my teeth. So my day had its challenges but has ended beautifully.

## Priya

Congratulations on reaching the half-way mark Chris! Well done!! So nice to read about how Sachin, Pawan and the rest of the team are looking after you and are kind to you. Well done to the whole team. Good luck for the second-half and hope you stay out of the red zone as much as possible

## Roddy

Dear Chris and team, very well done on making it to halfway- thanks so much to the team on the ground for taking such good care of Chris- he is very precious to us as you know.

Chris, stick in there, you will have better days. If your faith ever wavers, remember there are lots more religions out there that you can cling on to...

## Damien

The effort you go to each day, and at times when you are no doubt quite "garam", to share your daily rollercoaster of emotions and adventure with we spectators must at times feel like running another 50kms after getting off the bike – so kudos for those efforts as well.

Ice cream definitely well deserved reward for the halfway mark, although with the calories you're burning each day I'm sure you could justify some ice cream every day. But keep an eye on your Garmin. They are generally pretty accurate (apart from some altitude readings...) and a good indicator of how your body is handling the strain at times when you can't tell yourself. Half way is huge, which means there's still another huge to go – so consider a few "no PB" days as well. Either way – loving your work, Chris!

# Day 24

Wednesday 26 February

## Route details

From Rewa  
To Mirzapur  
Distance 2,400km  
Time 4 hours 24 minutes

### Paula

Please steer clear of rickshaws and snakes!! Though I loved the last night in Mumbai when you, Roddy and I went to dinner in a rickshaw while Alan ordered a fancy car!! And you are probably feeling the cold because you were born on the Welsh riviera....:)

### Ben W

I thought of you last night as I finished a knackerings 25K in a lovely spin studio. I reflected that you are doing four times this in somewhat more adverse conditions EVERY day. I was chatting to a few partners yesterday about your progress and you will be pleased to hear that the topic of conversation has moved from your bottom towards your thermal welfare.

### Carol

Loving your daily stories Chris. Never a dull moment on your bike! Keep those wheels turning – over half way already and you will soon be on the home straight. To add to the dodgy French/folk song recommendations, and inspired by your trip down memory lane a few days ago, here is a song recommendation that reminds me of our time in Hong Kong all of those years ago – Diana Ross, Chain Reaction.

# I Nearly Met My Maker Today

Day 24 is done, which is a relief as usual. The first 6km of the day, coming out of Rewa, were very difficult as it was cold and the roads were terrible. I can't even report that they were under construction. They just happened to be terrible, so I needed to cycle extremely carefully to avoid falling off.

**Slow climb for 40km** The early part of the day was reasonably flat, but the last I think 35 or 40km, we were climbing up before we entered into Uttar Pradesh. I think that really slowed my average time down. It was amazing because a lot of India is pretty flat and so it was odd suddenly coming out on top of the plateau and seeing some great escarpment down into the valley below.

**The roads here are a disaster** Since coming into Uttar Pradesh the roads have been an absolute disaster. I would say as bad as, if not worse, than the other day when we left the nature reserve. I said they were the worst roads I had ever been on, but I think these may have just beaten them. They are absolutely chocka with massive lorries.

**I nearly met my maker today** I had a horrible moment today where I thought I was about to meet my maker. I thought my family was going to have to read the book that I asked them to read should anything ever happen to me. I was on the highway and an auto rickshaw passed me, not going much faster than I was, and then abruptly pulled in front of me. At that stage, I couldn't see the road at all as I was right up behind the back of the auto rickshaw. After about 15 seconds the auto rickshaw started moving toward the middle of the road. I thought he was going to turn right and slow down a bit so I gently pulled to the left. To my horror and from my blind spot, an enormous lorry came thundering down the road at high

speed. Had I pulled over properly to pass the auto rickshaw on the left, I would've been plastered on the front of this lorry. Mercifully, I was able to switch back quickly behind the auto rickshaw. I guess the only positive would've been that my end would've been quick and I hope painless.

**We are now in Uttar Pradesh** I just crossed the border from Madhya Pradesh into Uttar Pradesh (UP), which is the most populous state in India. It's a critical state for political parties that are looking to run India, because there are many seats to be gained. UP is also Abdul's home and the capital of UP is Lucknow. I spent a very happy three days in Lucknow as I went to teach at the National Law School there. Lucknow is famous for its Biryani but also in particular for its finely minced meat, which is known as unday kebab. I think it was finely minced because the Nawabs of Lucknow, like many people of that time, had lost their teeth. Therefore they couldn't chew meat so it had to be very soft like baby food so it was easy to consume.

### Cooler weather from heavy rain

Apparently, the reason why the weather's cooler than normal is that there has been heavy rain and, not far from where we are now. A few days ago, I think yesterday even, there was heavy rain and a hailstorm. At least I wasn't cycling through that but that's resulted in some much much cooler air.

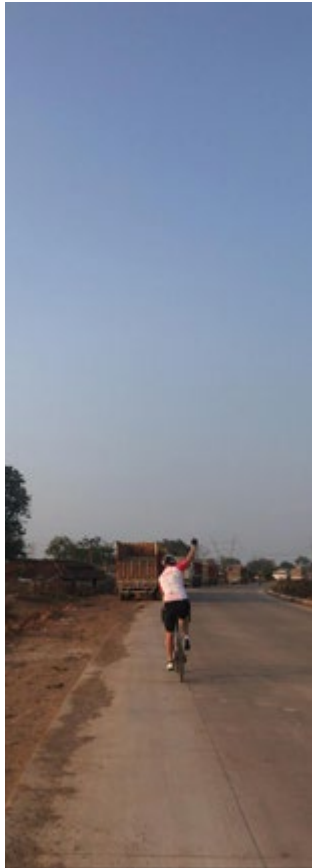
**An Englishman who loves warm weather** Pawan is a bit puzzled by the fact that I don't

like the cooler air, he thinks that would be good for cycling and, surely, being English, I should be used to colder weather. But, I have told him that I'm a bit of a sun freak and I need the heat on my body, and I much prefer exercising in heat. I got so cold at one point today. I think it was partly because I was tired. At lunchtime, after I'd eaten, I had to put my fleece on and even had the duvet over me as I slept. I looked like an Eskimo that was wrapped up. After Sachin woke me up I had a hot tea, which was good. I also used a tandoori oven to warm me up.

**On Spotify today...** I listened to quite a lot of music today and my guilt pleasure (don't tell Deb because I give her a hard time for listening to him) was listening to Michael Bublé, with the standout track 'Haven't met you yet'. It was great to push hard in a big gear to that track in particular.

I've also been listening to 'Behind the Sun' by Chicane which also has a fantastic beat for pushing a big gear along a straight road. It reminds me of my time in spin classes in the Broadgate Club. I have used this song for other long-distance cycling events and I also used it for my 30 marathons. The rhythm is fantastic as it drives me on.

**What's all the fuss about?** At lunch I ended up eating the salad that we have everyday but hidden in the salad were bits of chilli. I have to say that they qualify as the hottest thing I've ever eaten. Afterwards I had to hold my head as my mouth filled with what



felt like mouthfulls of saliva, which were just running onto the ground. Nothing seemed to be able to quench the pain and the heat. My eyes were watering. I was drinking lots of water. I was eating cheese. I was taking sugar. I was taking anything the guys were recommending. For 10 minutes I was in quite serious pain. It seems amusing now but it wasn't amusing at the time. It was a shocking experience which burnt my mouth, my stomach, and my lips.

As I was gasping for breath, Pawan was manfully chomping his way through a chilli like the one I'd eaten, saying he didn't know what the fuss was all about.

**Was feeling run down but I'm fine** I was worried I was getting ill today because I was so cold and had to put my fleece on, even

wrapping the duvet around me to sleep. I think I was just tired. My body was just probably wandering what was going on with getting hot, sweaty and then cooling down as well as being cold in the mornings. I feel a lot better now and hopefully I won't go down with some kind of bug.

**I'm glad I didn't cycle this route** The route today is from Rewa to Mirzapur, and we're travelling the last 57km by car, having done my 100km. Thank goodness I didn't have to cycle this last bit because the roads are just appalling. It's beyond a joke and I'm surprised we haven't all got neck injuries from being thrown from side to side. It's a truly awful experience. I take my hat off to Abdul (and Mahadev) who I'm in the car with, for driving in these conditions as they are extremely dangerous.

**Do we have a plan B or C?** I'm already dreading cycling tomorrow. If the roads are anything like the ones that we're travelling along at the moment, goodness knows where I'm going to cycle. To do 100km on a road like this will take me four days! Anyway, I know Sachin and Pawan will come up with a good plan, or at least I hope they will.

**Heading to Varanasi will be worth it** Had we gone directly to Delhi, or gone more towards the west, the roads would've been much better. The only saving grace is that we're veering eastwards for a really good reason.

We're heading towards Varanasi tomorrow, and the day afterwards we will be meeting a number of widows. These are widows that the Loomba Foundation helped using the money I raised in 2015. I'm sure the

discomfort and challenge will be worthwhile once we get there.

**Looking forward to meeting Sunita** When we get to Varanasi I am going to meet five widows who went through the above programme. These five women benefited from the work of the Loomba Foundation and one of them is called Sunita.

**I am a pygmy** I was looking at the stats for Eliud Kipchoge when he ran the marathon and broke the two hour barrier. I was comparing his stats with mine from today. I averaged 22.7km per hour wherea Kipchoge ran at nearly 21.18km/h. It shows that I am a pretty rubbish cyclist and how absolutely extraordinary Eliud Kipchoge is. He is a giant in the world of sportsmen whereas I am a pygmy.

# Day 25

Thursday 27 February

## Route details

From Mirzapur  
To Varanasi  
Distance 2,500km  
Time 4 hours 35 minutes

## David and Holly

Loving seeing how the country is changing as you head north. We think you should be greeted every day with an overstuffed paratha and a shower of rose petals; that's how we're starting our mornings from now on! David and Holly x

## nigelfarr

Hi Chris, enjoying reading your blog so much and my admiration grows by the day from already great heights. It must have been so special for you to meet with groups of widows helped by you in such a profound and life-changing way.

The touching shower of rose petals is an image to conjure with and I am sure an uplifting one for you to recall in future.

We all need a few archived memories for instant recall in order to bring a smile to our faces and an immediate lift, don't we?

When I think of Hong Kong in 1986/1987 I always recall (then) modern songs from the likes of A-ha and Aerosmith's revival of Walk This Way with Run-DMC. But the most fun was listening to the house band who were crammed in behind the door at Beefy's Pub in Kowloon pounding out note perfectly every good song ever recorded as we drank badly poured beers. It was wonderful sharing six months there with you. I think the Sun Always Shines on TV would be a good song to cycle to. Very best wishes Nigel.

# Reaching Varanasi and Being Showered With Petals

Another day done and a landmark. Day 25, 2,500km done, 2,000km to go. That feels nice and it also feels nice that we're in the religiously important city of Varanasi, on the Ganges. This is where many people bring their deceased relatives to be cremated on the banks of the river, and then for their ashes to be spread on the Ganges.

This morning was probably the most unpleasant morning we've had in terms of just the cold, mist and fog. In many ways it looked like a scene from one of the early Mad Max movies, a sort of end of the world scene.

**Strange route today** It was a bit of a strange old route today from Mirzapur to Varanasi, just because of the distances and some of the conditions of the roads. So, we sort of went up and back and then down and round and we're now heading to Varanasi itself in the car, having done 100km.

**It was like a war zone** I think in China, the whole area would've just been cleared to build a major highway but here in India the houses seem to be hanging to the sides of the roads by a few bricks. I find it almost feels like the front half of the house has been demolished to make way for the road and so there just seem to be half exposed rooms with broken bricks and things. It almost looks like a war zone from a film.

**Even the buffalos were cold** It was so cold this morning that some of the people had even wrapped their buffalo in blankets to keep them warm. It was pointed out to me that many of the cows that were roaming free on the roads are male cows because they're not productive. They're just left to fend for themselves whereas the female cows and buffalos are looked after and fed because they can produce milk.

## Paratha with my cauliflower and potato

At breakfast at 20km it was so cold I still had my hat on and my fleece. I was warming myself over the tandoori oven (again), watching the chef make stuffed paratha. Sachin asked him to put lots of gobhi (cauliflower and potato) and there was almost as much stuffing as there was paratha.

**A lovely pattie fire** The owner was incredibly kind and sweet as he asked if we wanted to have a fire made. I said no, that'll take too long but he said "No, no, no, no, we can do it quickly." He piled up dung patties (that is what they call dried cow dung) and it lit really quickly. Then it just smouldered and provided a lovely warmth, so we were able to have our chai and breakfast around the dung fire, the pattie fire.

**Feeling less sorry for myself** I was cycling along this morning, feeling pretty miserable and rather sorry for myself, and suddenly a cyclist passed me. That hasn't happened much on this journey and I thought this is ridiculous so I tucked in behind him and was able to observe what this guy was wearing. He was probably the same age as me and had a blanket wrapped around him. He was cycling on a really old Hercules bike, which looked to me like it could've been 50+ years old. It had no gears, metal brakes and a saddle as wide as a water buffalo. He had no socks, plastic sandals and he was moving along smoothly at 20-23km per hour. There I

was on a super expensive bike with all the kit on, expensive cycle shoes with cleats. So I decided I needed to feel less sorry for myself.

**Naked (Jain) men again** It's not everyday that you see dozens of naked men walking along the road but today was such a day. Sachin was explaining that they were Jain pilgrims on a pilgrimage to Varanasi, given how important Varanasi is. I managed to snap a picture as I walked past one group of the devotees. Quite appropriately, the picture was taken modestly from behind rather than from the front.

The other fascinating thing about the naked Jains was that they were carrying brushes. They were like brushes or fans that were made up of fallen peacock feathers so they're very soft. The Jains refrain from killing anything so the idea is to brush the insects off themselves or off anything they're going to sit on. According to Wikipedia they don't have possessions, wear clothes or have a begging bowl. I'm not quite sure what happens when it gets cold, as it clearly is at the moment.

**Last chai stop** At our last chai stop today we were surrounded by lots of boys and men who were, as ever, interested in the two support cars, my bikes, and maybe also a bit in me but not so much. The kind chaiwala allowed me to sit in his chaiwala position. Sachin managed to capture a nice video of our break.

**Mr Bean and Atul are reuniting** We're looking forward to catching up with Atul this evening who's joining us from Delhi. We've got the reception tomorrow evening, which we're all looking forward to. We will be joined by some of the widows (including Sunita) that benefited from the work of the Loomba Foundation, so that'll be Friday evening. Pawan will then formally hand over the baton to Atul and will head back to Delhi.

I'm hoping that Atul has brought me some warmer clothing from Delhi. I'm sure he has, because it's going to prove important pretty soon, maybe even tomorrow morning.

**My last visit to Varanasi** I last came to Varanasi with Lord Loomba in 2017 (I think) where we had a reception where a number of the widows were invited. We were also able to visit the aarti, which is a sort of prayer on the banks of the river. They happen every evening and are really quite a spectacle.

**Being showered with petals** I just had a very unexpected but very pleasurable experience. We met up with the team again from Oyo led by Rahul Choudhary. They wanted to film my entry to Varanasi for their internal and external comms and so I had to put all of my cycling gear back on to do a 20 metre ride, which they filmed and they very sweetly showered me with rose petals. It was, I think a holi celebration, and it was very sweet of them.



# Day 26

Friday 28 February

## Route details

From Varanasi  
To Varanasi  
Distance 2,600km  
Time 5 hours 4 minutes

### Pawan Kumar

Highly virtuous Buddhist monk is called Osho. I am following Osho Rajneesh. I have a belief that you are truly working for a genuine cause. Feelings are temporary based on prevailing circumstances. According to Osho – love and hate are two sides of a coin. It does not make any difference whether you encourage me or say sorry, but it certainly makes a huge difference that Chris is cycling for widows, we should appreciate him, support him. Har Har Mahadev

### Hemant Kumar

Good Morning Chris and team. Hope Chris has collected good memories during the cycling. Also, person like you always try to balance the situation and go ahead for noble cause. Keep doing good and good luck.

### Roddy

What a wonderful day in Varanasi and so good to turn the focus onto the widows and communities that you are so brilliantly supporting. Maybe our own Rebecca Perlman can find international outlets for the widows products? Here's hoping. As you say in your blog, you are mixing with the whole of humanity, which is very humbling when reading this in the comfort and privilege of affluent London. Take care.

# An Extraordinary Day in Varanasi

Day 26 done and that makes the total 2,600km. I'm knackered as it was a long day. The cycling part was long as we had breaks doing various things in and around Varanasi. My overall cycling time was over 5 hours.

**The ghats in varanasi were heaving** We set off early today and Atul was keen for us to go down to one of the main ghats, which are the river banks. I think there are 80 ghats in total in Varanasi, where different things happen. They can be for cremation, prayers or where people live. Even early in the morning it was absolutely heaving and it was unquestionably the most challenging conditions for cycling because there were so many people, mainly people walking.

There was such a mixture of people there that even on my racing bike with my racing kit, I somehow didn't look out of place because there was just so much of humanity there.

**It was tricky cycling in the city** A lot of work has been done to regenerate Varanasi and particularly as it's one of Prime Minister Modi's two home states. Some of it has been developed but a lot of it is still not developed. Some of the small lanes leading down to the ghats are extraordinary and the road is broken up with rubble so trying to cycle through all of that with cleats on was a major problem. I nearly toppled over twice. Luckily, I was able to grab hold of things because I couldn't get my feet out of the cleats quickly enough.

### Varanasi is a truly extraordinary place

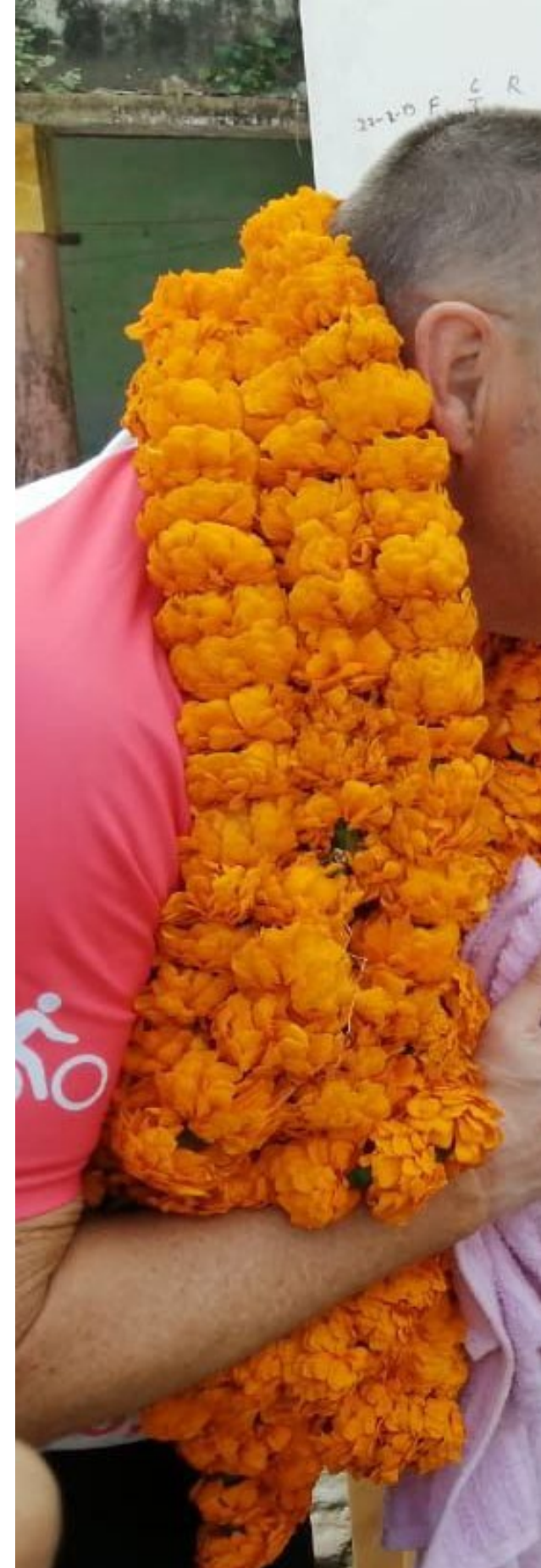
Whilst there were a lot of tourists in Varanasi, most people there were people who either lived in Varanasi or had travelled to Varanasi as part of a pilgrimage or to

cremate their relatives. If you want to visit one of the extraordinary sites of the world I would encourage you to go sooner rather than later. Work is being carried out to develop the city further but at the moment it feels like a very special, untouched place. It really is one of the special places in the world to visit.

### Meeting empowered widows was great

I was looking forward to lunchtime and we went to a village where there were around 10 widows, some of whom had come from other villages to meet me. It was a real challenge cycling there as the roads were rough, broken and there were potholes. Some of them were just dirt roads but the countryside was idyllic. Some of the villages that I cycled through were just exquisite. It was like they'd just been put there as a part of some sort of perfect film set, with dung patties drying, water buffalo sleeping and beautiful haystacks. Some really special scenes.

When we got to the village I was able to talk to the widows with the help of Atul. We talked about the work of the Loomba Foundation and how I'd been able to raise money. They explained how grateful they were for the training (sewing and garment making) they had received and for the sewing machines. They talked about what they were doing to earn money, although they all said that they would like a more consistent income. I know that's something that the Loomba Foundation is working on. »





**David and Holly**

What an amazing life-enhancing day; so great to hear about it. David and Holly x

**Damien**

Chris – truly remarkable that you managed to fit all of that into one day on top of another 100km in the saddle. The days in India must be 40 hours long! It also makes me wonder what extreme challenge you might be doing in another 5 years' time when you come back to visit those who will benefit from Cycling for Widows...

**Paula**

It's both humbling and inspiring to read your wonderful stories, Chris. I can only imagine what it must be like to experience it all first hand. I hope it helps you to have the energy to keep going on your epic cycling journey xx





**Treated to a prize cockerel** The meeting with the widows was hosted by a chap called Abhishek who works with the Loomba Foundation. He's hoping to be elected as head of the village, just like Abdul for his own village. We were treated to a local lunch and Abhishek had especially slaughtered one of his prize cockerels at 10am that morning, and he showed us a lovely picture of it. The cockerel was used for a chicken curry and chicken livers were also served separately. The whole experience was amazing including stroking a cow with big horns... but I was ready to leap out of the way if necessary as I was nervous.



**I also went to a reception** On top of all of that, there was also a reception. About 15 widows had been invited to a reception at a local hotel. They had brought along lots of examples of the products that they had made like silk bags, carrying cases, stuffed animals, toys and decorations, many of which are sold locally. The coordinator on the ground for the Loomba Foundation was also hoping to export a number of the products to Australia, in particular, and that certainly would help to enhance their earnings.



There was a press conference and Atul was able to brief the press and others who had gathered on the work of the Loomba Foundation. He kindly translated a few words that I had to say, but I was keen in particular to speak to the widows rather than simply talk to the press.

**Extraordinary performance by young girl** Some entertainment had been arranged, and there was an extraordinary young girl who, I think is 8 years old, and had only

been doing classical dance for a year. To my untrained eye she looked amazing. I was told by Atul and others that she had a really extraordinary talent, given her age and given how little time she had been doing this classical form dance. She has already won a number of awards at international competitions in various cities in India.

**Pawan, I'm sorry** Poor Pawan got the sharp end of my tongue today and I'm sure it was completely undeserved. I had cycled 70km and lunch was long overdue so I was tired and the roads had been very challenging. They were very difficult cycling conditions and I was hungry and tired. I was just taking my cycle shoes off and Mahadev was helping me as usual.

Pawan was keen that I should meet the widows as soon as possible, as they'd been there for some time. I slightly threw my toys out of the pram and explained that I was exhausted. So, Pawan said something like "jaldee karo" which means hurry up in Hindi. It was at that moment that I snapped and said, Pawan, back off, just back off. I said 'baba garam' meaning I'm hot, tired and cross. So I formally apologise to Pawan through the blog and I'll also say sorry to him in person tomorrow.

**Meeting the school kids** I met some school kids down some very remote country lane. They seemed delighted at the bikes and the supports cars, and all the paraphernalia, and they got very excited when Atul and Sachin were filming them. There was one boy with a small homemade gun that was sort of classic Indian jugaad toy gun that made loud noises.

# Day 27

Saturday 29 February

## Route details

From Varanasi  
To Prayagraj  
Distance 2,700km  
Time 4 hours 17 minutes

# Varanasi On My Mind

Another day done, so that's 2,700km. It was pretty flat, the wind was pretty favourable for me and the road was good for most of it. There were, however, some sections of construction and building that slowed me down. I was pleased with my time of 4 hours and 17 minutes and particularly after yesterday when I was over 5 hours.

**I was tired today** I was tired today because we did so much in Varanasi yesterday that I ended up being exhausted. I've told Sachin that he needs to treat me slightly like a child, in that I've been faffing around on my iPhone a bit too much. I really should be turning my light off at 10pm but I'm normally turning it off at 11pm. So, I've suggested that, once we've had our physio session, he confiscate my phone and give it back to me in the morning.

**Have I taken on too much?** There were times today in the middle section of cycling where my body was still able to cycle but my mind was thinking, I'd like this to be over, and there's too much to go. So, that little man that appears on my shoulder from time to time made an unhelpful appearance, suggesting that it would be nice to give up, but we need to keep pressing on.

**Dancing at the rail crossing** We had to wait for a train at a crossing today. Atul came up to join me and I was listening to my great songs, as usual. I thought a little dance would be nice and I enjoyed it. The large crowd of people that were also waiting seemed to enjoy it or maybe I'm just fooling myself.

**Leaving Varanasi and Pawan** So we left Varanasi today and said goodbye to Pawan. We had a hug and thanked him for all his support for the team as he has now formally handed over to Atul. It's been difficult for Atul rejoining us because there is unrest and rioting in Delhi. Therefore he's concerned

for his wife and son. His son was reluctant for him to come back and join us, which is completely understandable.

**Varanasi, Kashi and Benares** Varanasi is the most ancient city of India, and has been lived in for 3,000 years so it is India's oldest continuously inhabited city. Centuries ago, Varanasi was known as Kashi, the ancient city of Kashi. I think it was renamed Varanasi as the confluence of two rivers, the Varuna and the Asi. So it's the confluence of these two rivers that are part of the Ganges. The British and Muslims referred to the city as Benares. When India became independent the city was renamed as Varanasi.

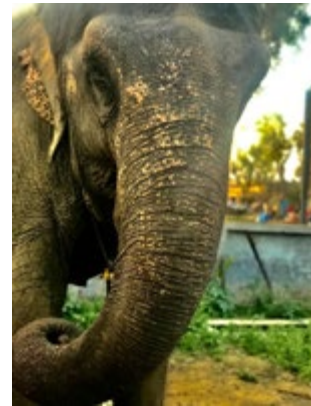
**A cremation at Manikarnika ghat** The cremations take place 24/7 and Sachin and Atul went to one of the ghats where they take place. They took a video and there are two cremations taking place in the background and you can just make out the fires. The ghat where they are is called Manikarnika.

**Rural widows can't remarry!** I asked the widows I met yesterday if they would ever get remarried. They said that culturally within rural India it would be very unusual for a widow to get married. This would especially apply if they had children. Even if they don't have children it would still be rare for them to remarry. I thought that might be the case but I wasn't sure so it was interesting to have it confirmed. Therefore that is another challenge they have to face.

**Please support me** I really appreciate your support. Thanks for all the comments, messages of support and music recommendations. Yesterday I met some widows who I was able to help through my previous fundraising. This time round I want to support a project in Kashmir so please help me by making a donation.

**My weight is down, hooray!** I weighed myself today using some food scales and I am overjoyed to report that I weigh 80.4kg so I've definitely lost some weight. I was 83kg so I've gone down to 80.4kg so I've lost 2.5kg, which I'm pleased about. I don't know if that's good or bad, maybe they think it's terrible. Anyway, I'm really pleased, and my goal is to have a number beginning with a 7 by the time I get to Srinagar, even if it's 79.99.

**An elephant in somebody's front garden** We spotted an elephant in somebody's front garden. Apparently the owner of the house is a wealthy businessman called Ram Kumar and he's keeping the elephant as other people would keep dogs as a pet. The keepers will take it for a walk each day, feed it, wash it and take care of it. Her name is Chanda so she is a female elephant and is 25 years old which is absolutely magnificent! She was eating sticks and branches, and Sachin ran off to get me a banana to feed her. The guys were getting very upset as they wanted me to give the banana to her immediately because they were concerned that she might get irritated. They kept on shouting, "Give! Give! Give immediately!"



**The man with no age** We met an elderly gentleman at the chai shop who had no idea how old he was. When we asked him he said 58, which is obviously the same age as me. I suspect he was a little older, at least I hope he was a little older. Sachin asked him about the nice necklace around his neck. It turned out to be a lovely example of jugaad as it was a bit of copper wire that he used as a toothpick which he had to hand at all times. You can see him using it, or pretending to, in the photo.

**The V hand signal means...** I've learnt some hand signals today. The little finger up means that I want a wee and the V sign means that I want a poo. It's surprising that its taken 15 years of visiting India to be told these two things.

**Exercising with a giant vegetable** Abdul

gave me a giant vegetable called bottle gourd that weighed a tonne. Sachin thought it would be good exercise for my wrist, which is still very sore, to do a sort of circle around the head, which is a typical exercise undertaken by Indian wrestlers.

**Kumbh Mela Hindu pilgrimage** When I was in the car travelling to where we are staying tonight, we crossed a bridge where there is a merger of three rivers. Those three rivers are the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati. The reason this is so significant is for religious reasons, as this is where they hold the Kumbh Mela, which is a major Hindu festival and pilgrimage.

They are held every 12 years but they do hold a smaller version at the 6 year point. This is the biggest gathering of people anywhere in the world, and you can see

pictures from space to show the gathering of people. They've built an entire city to accommodate these millions of people that visit. The last full Kumbh Mela was in January 2019.

**Thank you Oyo and Gutenberg** The reception yesterday was held at an Oyo hotel, separate to where I was staying. They kindly provided this hotel for the reception free of charge which I'm very grateful for. I also want to thank Gutenberg who are our media partner and have been working on our media coverage here in India. Gutenberg is a global integrated digital marketing agency that has enjoyed a long association with The Loomba Foundation. As their official communications partner, they have assisted the charity with media outreach for several of their projects and events over the years. Many thanks to both Oyo and Gutenberg.

#### Mahendra Kumar

Hare Krishna hare Ram, Ram Ram hare hare, Very very nice, Best of luck all the team,

#### Damien

Chris – I am amazed that the little man on your shoulder can even keep up! Listen to him, engage with him, but leave him in no doubt you're the boss and he's just along for the ride (literally). And with only 2/5ths of the mission left, I'm already starting to wonder what I will do without your daily fascinating insights into an amazing country.

All power to your pedals.

#### S

Once the "middle section" is over you probably won't want to stop, ever. (Do you remember Forrest Gump?)

#### Clive

Breakfast won't be the same without your blog Chris! Do please feel at liberty to extend your ride for us all!!!

#### David and Holly

Just remember which hand gestures you're using in which country!! David & Holly x

#### Alan

Your blog is a highlight every morning Chris! You are doing a fabulous job. Keep it up Baba (and don't be garam!). All our best. Alan and family

#### Priya

Keep up the good work Chris! You are doing an amazing job – physically and mentally – challenging yourself daily for a very good cause. And selfishly, like most others, I don't want you to quit as I love reading your blogs:)! They are very entertaining and insightful – you should think about compiling them into a coffee-table book at some stage.

# Day 28

Sunday 1 March

## Route details

From Prayagraj  
To Kanpur  
Distance 2,800km  
Time 4 hours 3 minutes

### Meenal Shah

I hope your knee gets better soon. It is so fun to follow your adventures and well done with the videos.

### Paula

DYDD GWYL DDEWI HAPUS!!

### Nicholas Peacock

Well done Chris. Looking good. March is the month you finish.

### Miriam

You've made it to March!!! Fantastic achievement so far. Looking forward to seeing you back at HSF once you have completed this. It makes the spin class I'm about to attend seem a little tame! Good luck for the rest of your cycle.

### Clive

The daffodils are out here Chris for March and St David's Day! Keep steadily making progress and take your son's good advice about time records! When I commute by bike I decided it was far safer to ignore time, heart rate, Garmin and all that stuff otherwise I'd just be taking risks.

# You Donkey, Squeeze Over!

Day 28 done which is great and today is 1st March so that feels significant. I've been on the road now with the team for exactly four weeks and that is a long time to be doing some endurance event every day for four weeks. It feels really good to reach March, to cycle the first day of March and to have completed four weeks too.

The start today was a bit miserable. Instead of fog we actually had a bit of light drizzle and some light rain as well so it was odd being in India in March and having rain. We're certainly nowhere near the monsoon season. For a lot of India its usually either pre-warm weather or coming up to the summer, so it was certainly unusual. The guys said it was very unusual for it to rain at this time of the year, and I know it's been raining in Delhi from reports from Pawan.

**"Forget about breaking 4 hours"** The conditions were pretty good today and I managed to achieve a new personal best for this trip. My previous personal best was 4 hours and 4 minutes, and I managed to do 4 hours and 3 minutes. There were some challenges but not many, and the wind was mostly either neutral or favourable, so I think breaking the 4 hour barrier is going to be difficult.

Maybe I won't do it but I'm more than happy with 4 hours and 3 minutes, particularly as two days ago it was over 5 hours. Ed, my youngest son said to me "Dad, please forget about the breaking 4 hours malarkey because you'll exhaust yourself trying to do it. The bigger goal is to complete the full distance", and I guess that's right.

The team took a lovely picture of different spices and herbs. Some of them are

apparently used for various medical conditions, some of which are of a personal nature, so I won't go into details.

**Using the GoPro** Sachin rigged up the GoPro right at the end of the day on the handlebars of my bike. We can hopefully have some fun in due course with the GoPro and recording some of the things I see, from my line of sight.

**The 'donkey' and the shotgun!** There was a reckless driver today that overtook Mahadev and Atul and then he pulled in tight against me, which looked like it was done on purpose. I was shocked and upset so I shouted at him saying he was a donkey.

As he passed me and this isn't visible in the video but to my horror, the guy in the front passenger seat was carrying a shotgun. As you can imagine I'm glad we didn't stop to have an altercation with them.

**My knee is taking forever to heal** My knee is a bit sore and Sachin has been putting some cream on it, partly as an antiseptic but also to keep it moisturised. It's taking a rather long time to get better. The problem is that as I pedal, it moves and creases so the scab keeps breaking and it keeps re-bleeding. Sachin keeps cleaning it and then applying moisture, some antiseptic and moisture cream, which is also a little bit painful.

**Media coverage from Varanasi** We managed to get some media coverage in Varanasi when we were there two days ago and there is a news report that was recorded during the reception in the evening. It carries the caption 'breaking news' to make it rather exciting. Quite apart from my few comments, Atul said a lot in Hindi about the Loomba Foundation and the work of Lord Raj Loomba and his wife Lady Loomba.

**Are they thinking 'that's rubbish'?** Atul and Sachin have just been listening to the news report, following the press conference we gave in Varanasi. It's all in Hindi and the news reporter managed to get all the facts wrong. What she reports is quite amusing and here are some of the funnier parts of the report:

- I was cycling 45km in 45 days, so that's 1km per day!
- I arrived in Varanasi after completing 26km... a little oversight as it was 2,600km.

How wonderful is that! So, I think the poor people listening to the news must be thinking, 'that's rubbish!'

### Railway announcements all night long

The hotel we stayed in last night was right on the railway station and there were announcements being made all night. »



### David and Holly

What a shame none of those spices could be put to good use to aid recovery of that ugly looking scab. Whilst I agree with Ed that you don't want to exhaust yourself, it is good to have targets. You mentioned yesterday how motivation in these later stages was difficult and having something to focus on can help with that. Perhaps the team can think of other challenges to keep you mentally stimulated without it being too physically demanding. Happy St David's day boyo.

### Siew Boon Lou

It's wonderful to read Pawan's blog and get his perspective on the trip. Well done to the team. It's inspirational.

### Damien

Chris – I was thinking the video of your road rage effort was a little tame in the circumstances (that driver was definitely more than just a "donkey"...), but when I subsequently read your comment about the passenger's chattel I was equally relieved you didn't label him correctly! The relentless effort will no doubt continue to take its toll but don't let it trigger a snap – at other road users, your crew or perhaps most importantly yourself.

### Seamus

I remember getting very confused about lakhs and crores. If I remember correctly then 4,500km would be 45 lakhs of metres. But that could be quite wrong.

The receptionist was brutally honest when Atul checked in because he said, "Look, can we have the quietest room for Chris as he's tired and has cycled a long way". He also asked 'is it quieter on the railway side or on the other side?'. I thought the receptionist might say they have double glazing and it's good on both sides.

Unfortunately the response was that it's bad on both sides, so it doesn't make any difference which was an extraordinarily candid answer. I didn't sleep very well and it must have been bad as Sachin didn't sleep well too. The man (Sachin) who can sleep through anything was woken up by the trains and announcements.

**Paan delight in Varanasi** I've been meaning to share a video from two nights ago when we were in Varanasi and Sachin and Atul went exploring that evening. They wanted to try some paan as Varanasi is famous for it. They managed to persuade Abdul to go along with them. It was easy to persuade Abdul to go as he is addicted to paan as Mahadev is to his phone and I am to chai.

**Happy St David's Day** And a very happy St. David's today to my mum and to Jo, who live very near St. Davids, and to Paula, of course, my friend and colleague- we shared a birth hospital in Swansea. And to all my other Welsh friends.

### Thank you and over to Pawan

Thanks for the comments. It's hard to explain how much they mean to me but it's a lot as they keep my spirits up. I've asked Pawan to share his thoughts after he spent 15 days with us so here he is...

### Hello, I am Pawan

I've been working at the Loomba Foundation since 2011 and I am the Education and Operations Manager. I manage our educational programmes and our empowerment projects, in coordination with Atul. It makes me proud to help widows and to serve my country. I am originally from Delhi where I live with my parents and 2 brothers. My wife is called Meenu and I have a son aged 22 and a daughter who is 14 years old.

### It has been an amazing experience

I was honoured and excited when asked to accompany Chris on his Cycle for Widows venture. Spending 15 days with Chris has been an amazing experience to see his determination, commitment and hard work while pursuing his objective of cycling the whole length of India to help widows in Kashmir.

### Chris is so determined

Chris is a very determined individual and I guess that is obvious considering he has taken on a challenge of this magnitude. I got an opportunity to see his physical strength when we went to see the Kuntala waterfall where we had to go down and climb back up around 440 steps. I was feeling tired whereas Chris to my utter surprise did it effortlessly.

### Falling off and getting back on the bike

Cycling 100km each day is no easy task. I saw the determined side to Chris when he fell off his bike. Despite injuring his wrists and grazing his leg he did not stop cycling. Instead he rested only after completing his day's target of cycling 100km. We were all impressed and that is why Abdul and Mahadev praised him with garlands. It was a memorable occasion.

### Chris is down to earth

I really admire Chris. It is a great credit to him that despite being a successful lawyer in the UK, he is a very down to earth person. During the 15 days I saw him staying overnight in simple hotels, eating food from local dhabas and he was mainly getting washed using a bucket. He never moaned or complained about anything at all.

### Interacting with widows

It was nice to see Chris meeting and interacting with the widows in Varanasi. He was pleased to see that the widows had benefited (training and being given sewing machines to earn money) from his previous fundraising. He was also happy to see all the lovely items that they made as displayed in the reception that evening.

It was a wonderful experience to be with Chris and the team, including Sachin, Mahadev and Abdul. They are all serving Chris well and without their help I doubt that this whole operation would have been as smooth as it has been. Atul has now taken over and I would like to wish the team the best. See you in Srinagar.



# Day 29

Monday 2 March

## Route details

From Kanpur

To Kanpur

Distance 2,900km

Time 4 hours 8 minutes

## Within a Hare's Breath of the Two Thirds Mark

It was a good day today but it's always more of a challenge when it's a loop. We're in Kanpur which is an industrial town and one thing it is famous for is leather. I'm not sure that people would visit it otherwise and it made me think of Port Talbot in South Wales. I know that Port Talbot often comes top of the least attractive towns in the UK.

There were times this morning where it was cold and I didn't particularly want to be on my bike. I was looking across at the industrial landscape, landfill dumps and various other things and it made me reflect that in comparison, Port Talbot almost looked like a holiday destination. So I'd like to apologise to the people living in Kanpur or who are from Kanpur as maybe there are bits that I haven't seen that are more attractive.

**My third fastest time today** I had a very cosy sleep today at lunch time. The guys found what they referred to as a 'cabana' and it had an open bit where the cool air was blowing in. It was really rather nice and so much so that I didn't want to have my post-lunch physio sessions or to get back on the bike. Sachin encouraged me again to do four sessions of 25km rather than five sessions of 20km, as I had done once before. I push myself for the last 5km of each 25km section and you'll see that my time again was really good today as it was 4 hours and 8 minutes. I think it is the third quickest time I've done on this trip so far so that was good and I don't feel too exhausted.

**Feeling good now** The end of the day when I'm doing these blogs I'm always in a much better mood. It's just so lovely to have finished another day and of course we're within a hare's breath of the two thirds mark at 3,000km which I hope, all being well, we will complete tomorrow as we go into Lucknow.

**The white SUV drivers are lunatics** I had a very close and nasty experience with a car yesterday. It always seems to be people who drive white SUVs who drive like lunatics. Somebody passed me and they were so close that they had to pull the wing mirror in, as they passed me at speed. As soon as they passed me, the passenger pushed the wing mirror out again, so that was pretty frightening.

**Feeling the love** This trip has been marked by many acts of love frankly and there have been two good recent examples. When we checked into the hotel yesterday, the room that I'd been allocated wasn't the best. The hotel tried to give me a good room because they knew I wanted to get a decent night's sleep. It was tucked away at the back of the hotel in the corner and just smelt of damp and fungus. It was so overpowering that my heart absolutely sank. Sachin came in and realised that it wasn't good and I wasn't happy so he immediately volunteered to allow me to go into his room.

The second example is that pretty much ever since my accident, Mahadev has been insisting that he helps me get my cycle stuff on and off at each stop. He takes my shoes off and he also helps me puts them on. It's the same with my socks and he towels me down as if I'm a sort of boxer in between rounds. There are just so many other wonderful acts of love that make me think how fortunate and grateful I am to be a part of this team.

**On my playlist today** In terms of music today, I enjoyed 'Chain reaction' by Diana Ross, and 'The Sun always shines on TV' by Aha. Thanks for the recommendations and for great memories in Hong Kong with Nigel and Carol as well as separately with Jason, who I've more recently re-engaged with which has been lovely. Also I'd like to give a shout out to Dr Chris Jones, who many years ago, introduced me to Sarah McGloughlin and I've been enjoying listening to her including 'Adia' and 'Building a mystery'.

**Uttar Pradesh is so populated** We're still in Uttar Pradesh and I've said before it's a significant state for political purposes, not least because of the enormous size of the population. Uttar Pradesh has a population of 223 million at the moment. If it was listed as a separate country it would come in at the fifth biggest country in the world, after the USA and Indonesia but ahead of countries such as Pakistan and Brazil.

**Excited about going to Lucknow** I'm excited about going to Lucknow tomorrow because I had a really nice visit there a couple of years ago. I went to teach at the National Law School in Lucknow and I have very fond memories of it. Abdul is particularly excited because he's been desperate to have some Handi Mutton, which is basically a pot (handi pot) and mutton. Normally in India it means goat, so it would be a sort of goat stew or goat curry. It's one of Abdul's



favourites and had we stayed in Prayagraj (Day 27/8) for another day he was going to drive home (another act of love) to get the recipe from his wife so he could cook it. So he was rather disappointed because we didn't have a second night in Prayagraj.

**One of the world's greatest pleasures** Sachin and I have just been to the local barbers. I had a haircut, my beard trimmed and a massage and, Sachin had his beard trimmed. In total it was 200 rupees which is about £2 and that is unbelievable value for one of the world's greatest pleasures.

**Thanks for all the comments** I read all the comments regularly and I quite often read them two or three times, so please keep them coming. I see that Paula has dropped back to join the main peloton. The two people who have made a break from the pack are Holly & David and Damien. But there is plenty of opportunity for the others

to reel them back in. I'm sad that my mum, who is ill, hasn't been able to comment this time around as she was so engaged for my last blog in 2015 when I did the 30 marathons.

**Crazy scene with pigs in the alley** We saw some boar/pigs in an alley way and there were well over 50. I told Sachin to go in and take a picture but he was too frightened. I said I would but he wasn't keen so he took a picture and you can see some but not all of them. The 50 odd boar/pigs were like a whole load of giant rats. It really was a scary vision so I don't really blame Sachin on that one. They were all sort of almost crawling all over each other to eat the rubbish. It was quite a sight.

**Cow waiting to be fed at a dabha** When we went out for dinner last night, Sachin managed to snap a picture of a cow waiting to be fed at a local dhaba station. Abdul

thought he was probably fed every evening with roti. So it was patiently waiting for its daily feed. The picture is a little dark but you can clearly make out the cow waiting there.

**Hyundais are everywhere** I've been, not surprisingly, filling my time looking at the cars passing me on the highway. Without having done any research but based on a sort of impression, it's clear that Hyundai seem to be doing unbelievably well in India in terms of the number of cars it sells in the market. Hyundai is of course a South Korean company and I visited it once when I went to visit our office in Seoul.

**Shout out to Tata and JLR** On the theme of cars I'd like to give a big shout out for the great Tata Group and Jaguar Land Rover in particular. I have to say that I absolutely love the look of the new Land Rover Defender and I hope that one day I might be able to own one.

### Paul McKeating

Chris, am following your blog and very much enjoying the updates. What an amazing feat and great to hear about the fantastic team you have around you too. Keep peddling!

### Kritika

Keep going Chris! You really are an inspiration and I echo the others that as much as I know you can't wait for the end, I would be very sad to not have my daily dose of Chris baba and his adventures with my morning coffee!

### Clive

Hi Chris by now maybe you've done the two thirds distance – it's all downhill now!!!! I'm off cycling today on a sunny but frosty morning so however chilly you feel I'll be colder! No cyclists tans here it's full leggings weather!!!! And to prove I read to the end of your blogs... the new Defender looks great but is smaller inside than my Disco 4 which is no good for me – I saw one at the launch event. Keep going!

### Priya

Well done on your speed Chris. Jealous about the massage and haircut for £2!!!! But very happy for you. Enjoy the love and little luxuries that India and Indians are offering you and stay safe (and away from SUVs).

### Damien

Chris – your GoPro footage of the mayhem you are dealing with gives the whole story an extra dimension. Not only is it more dangerous than your average suburban commute (and a red flag to the road rage rider that appears to be hidden somewhat shallowly within you...), but it must also make it considerably more demanding both physically and mentally. I can only hope that all 4,500km aren't like that! Keep feeling the love – it's working wonders so far.

# Day 30

Tuesday 3 March

## Route details

From Kanpur

To Lucknow

Distance 3,000km

Time 4 hours 2 minutes

# Six Reasons Today is a Milestone

So today feels like a real milestone. So, what is it about today's distance that's so important?

1. 3,000km completed
2. 30 days done
3. Two thirds of the ride done
4. Just over two weeks and 1,500km left
5. A new personal best of 4 hours and 2 minutes
6. Equals the longest endurance event I've ever done, namely the 30 days and 30 marathons

**The P.B. was without even trying** The personal best was much to my surprise, and looking at the Garmin stats it was without pushing too hard. I'm fitter than I was but I was also helped by the favourable wind and the roads were good today. With regard to equaling my longest endurance event, my first pedal tomorrow morning, on Day 31, means this event will be the longest.

**It's turned warmer** The cold weather front also seems to have passed for the moment. The morning temperature has risen a little bit so it's warmer in the morning and by mid-afternoon, it's up to about 28 or 29 degrees. It's a lovely temperature to be cycling in, and apologies to all of my friends in Europe who are struggling in cold and wet weather at the moment.

**My wrists are still 'paining'** My leg is still a bit of a drama and everyone talks about it. When I stop cycling a lot of people point to it as they want to know what happened. My leg looks dramatic but it's my wrists that are bad, particularly my left one. I can't do press-ups and other exercises that Sachin wants me to do in the morning so we've had to adapt, like doing other exercises. We're still doing our 15/20 minutes of warm-up each morning, which is completely exhausting but will hopefully continue to get me into much better shape.

**The monkeys are busy on a Tuesday** For our physio at breakfast time we quickly converted our breakfast table into a physio clinic, and Sachin went to work shortly thereafter. The only disappointment at breakfast was that the dhaba owner said that we really shouldn't eat outside because the macaque monkeys would eat our food. Atul had to persuade him that, "No, Baba wants to see monkeys"; so, "Please can we sit outside?"

To my great disappointment, there were no monkeys. The dhaba man didn't miss a beat as he said that on Tuesdays, it's the celebration of the monkey God, Hanuman. The monkeys were worshipping the monkey God on Tuesday, so that's why they weren't around.

**That lovely metal on metal sound** I had just settled down to sleep and somebody from the restaurant came and sat down next to me or practically next to me. In that wonderful way where people just seem to be oblivious of what's going on around them, the person from the restaurant started cleaning the pot with a spoon, scraping metal on metal, and it was unbelievably loud. Sachin had a quiet word to ask whether he might be able to clean it somewhere else, which thankfully he did.

**Handi mutton and widows** We've arrived in Lucknow and I like this city very much. I'm looking forward to some handi mutton this evening. Abdul, as you can imagine, is very excited about this dish too. The other important thing about Lucknow is that the Loomba Foundation have also been running a project here in conjunction with the Minister for Women, and they've been working with 100 widows in Lucknow, which is great.

**Beautiful Lucknow and its wonderful birdlife** Lucknow is the capital of Uttar Pradesh. When I was last here I stayed in a beautiful Taj property, an older property but very beautiful. It was one of the highlights before lecturing at the National Law School.

I spent time in the park next door to the Taj where I ran and the park was beautifully kept. It was full of birds like cattle egret, drongos showing me their acrobatic skills, babbler birds, myna, weavers, and a whole lot more. I remember it was just gorgeous.

**'Within a hare's breath' is a 'Samism'** Sam is my eldest son and he has mistaken various English phrases over the years. I refer to these interpretations as 'Samisms'. Jose's spelling in the blog of the phrase within a 'hare's breath' of 3,000km, »



### Alan

Salman Khan! ? Arey Baba! I am not sure our physiques are directly comparable. Great to see you get to 3,000km. I am sure that the wrist will improve (and it's good that your posterior is no longer paining). Can't wait for the book – you will get many years out of that.

### Dina

Alright alright! On way to the gym right now to tweak my tight core but will provide a top something when I get back. Dina

### Priya

Super proud of you and the team Chris – well done on completing 3k!!! And thanks for lightening up our morning with hilarious misspellings and Samisms – adorable! Oh and that handi mutton – looked yummy – continue to enjoy Indian delicacies and hospitality and keep on pedalling – not long to go...

### Damien

Sounds like you had a busy Tuesday too, Chris – so does that also make you a monkey...? With a PB at this point in the traverse maybe you were worshipping the Garmin Gods whilst they celebrated Hanuman.

Whatever it was, it sounds like another amazing day. For another bloody chapter. In another bloody book. Can't bloody wait!

### Dina

Chris. Ok here we are. Easy in some ways though spoilt for choice. These are all very personal to me. As I have been remiss in commenting I will now try and make up for that with a comment as long as your posts. First of all Italian. My top choice is Ti Amo by Umberto Tozzi; it was a massive hit in 1979

while I was living in Paris and learning Italian at school. It stands out for me because of its wealth of useful vocabulary; apart from Italian stallion pastiche expressions such as the singer saying he 'commands in bed' and 'trembles before his love's bosom', there are useful words like 'farfalla' which yes is a pasta shape but also butterfly, and a whole suite of terms of great use in discussions with hotel chambermaids, such as carta igienica (toilet paper), stirare (to iron) and lenzuola di lino (linen sheets). In what Anglo Saxon love song do you find all of that??

Other choices are Susanna by Adriano Celentano (a good story in which he is dumped by his dubious mistress), and Sarà Perchè ti Amo by Ricchi e Poveri (which is quite eurovisiony and jolly).

Now to the French love songs. Hard choices here. Amongst the ladies the queen is Françoise Hardy; try her Il y a eu des nuits (lost love) and Tous les Garçons et les Filles de mon Age (nobody loves me). I also like the more recent La Liste by Rose (current happy love). The men are quite into the topic too. When I was young I overdosed on Michèle by Gérard Lenorman (first love). High on the list for effort with lyrics is Johnny Hallyday's Je te Promets (hot sweaty love).

Another total master is Joe Dassin with L'Été Indien (lost love), A toi and Et si tu n'existais pas (in love adoring love songs). Claude François's Comme d'Habitude (Paul Anka turned it into My Way) and Charles Aznavour's Bon Anniversaire (both songs are love on the rocks) are more unusual approaches. And Michel Sardou's La Maladie d'Amour (love as a sickness and a magic potion) is a real belter sing a long. Have a great happy and safe cycle tomorrow!

should have read as a 'hair's breadth'. In other words, it's so small that's it's the breadth of hair, rather than being so small that it's the same as a hare's breath. I rather like the reference to a hare's breath and I'm going to use that in the future.

The phrases below are ones that Sam has got wrong over the years. They're all highly amusing but not as good as the one by Jose... 'Within a hare's breath', I love that!

- rest bite (respice)
- internal flame (eternal)
- standing elevation (ovation)
- ration of bacon (rasher)
- learn by rope (rote)
- all in tense and purposes (intents)
- tether hooks (tenter)
- its' beggars belief (it begs belief)

**I can learn a lot from Atul** I have to give a big shout out to Atul. He's spent so much of the day on the phone working with Oyo to find the best accommodation and the best places for us to stay. In a number of the cities it's proving very difficult to find the appropriate accommodation. It has to be within a certain distance so that when I reach 100km, we can avoid travelling a long time in the car. Atul does it all without any complaint, without any moaning and with great modesty. I can learn a lot from that.

I have to add that I've also been giving Atul a hard time too as whenever the hotel is less nice, we seem to stay for two nights.

Whenever it's nice, like today and it's an Oyo townhouse, we only stay for one night. I was keen to stay another night here but that's not happening as we're moving rapidly on to the next destination early tomorrow morning.

**"Oh, not that bloody book again"** A few people have been asking if there will be a book in memory of the cycling I'm doing now, like the one that was published for the 30 marathons called 'One man walking'. I understand there will be one but I don't know what it's going to be called, maybe 'One Man cycling'.

As soon as I thought of the book, I thought of my friend and work colleague, Alan Montgomery. Alan is our very own Salman Khan and I have to say, he does look like him. He will regard that as flattering so I hope it doesn't go to his head. The reason I thought of Alan is because he used to go to meetings with me and I was always handing out the 'One Man Walking' book to clients and contacts. He would say, "Oh, not that bloody book again", and so, I have visions now of the new book and Alan's heart sinking as I hand it out again, saying "Oh no, not that book".

**'Brawne' and 'sweetdis'** I've seen some lovely signs today of misspelt names. The first one I saw was 'brawne with ice cream' which is meant to be brownies. We joke that this is a chocolate brownie that makes you strong. The other thing I noticed relates to the little spa in the lovely Oyo townhouse in Lucknow that we're staying in. In fact, it is the first hotel that we've come across with a little spa and it is advertising a 'sweet dis

massage'. I'm hoping to have a 'Swedish massage' later this evening.

**I'm nearly finished** I just had a core session with Sachin and Atul and, I have to say, it nearly finished me off. Sachin keeps explaining that the core is incredibly important for cycling because it affects your legs, your hips and your calves. They all depend on having a strong core, so despite the pain and sweat, I'm always happy to do stuff he recommends.

**Handi mutton time** We went to an extraordinary restaurant this evening and it was absolutely enormous. We took a video of the kitchen as they deal with a lot of deliveries as well as food for the restaurant itself. It's the number one ranked restaurant in Lucknow for handi mutton, so it was cool to go there. We also took a video of the handi mutton, which they cook over the tandoor, after it was delivered in an earthenware pot to our table.

**Thank you and message for Dina** Thank you again for your fantastic comments, I really appreciate them. I see that Dina has commented for the first time. I'm still waiting for your recommendations for beautiful French and Italian love songs, which I still haven't received! SO DINA, IF YOU'RE OUT THERE, PLEASE SEND SOME RECOMMENDATIONS, THANKS SO MUCH.

We passed by a Jaguar-Land Rover showroom today and I mentioned the Discovery in yesterday's blog. I'm still keen on the Land Rover Defender despite Clive's comment that it's not as big as a Discovery 4.



# Day 31

Wednesday 4 March

## Route details

From Lucknow  
To Hardoi  
Distance 3,100k  
Time 4 hours 2 minutes

### Paula

I think I still prefer pass the parcel. Go Chris!!

### peterchatergmailcom

I remember lots of dried out cow dung from the fields and moors at home in Devon, I should have carried them home to put on the wood burner!

Great to see you're crunching through the distance, best of luck for tomorrow, and hope you get some chicken curry for tea ☺

### Anonymous

Hi Chris. Today's blog is good. Team is marvelous. That's why called union is Strength. Good Luck and take care.

### David and Holly

Hope you're not too shaken up by the cobbles – good practice for the tour de France. The smell and sight of dried cow dung fires has stayed with us since our trip to India – waste not want not! Lovely to be back in the countryside. David and Holly x

### Dina

Sorry you have had a stressful day, in part at least, but hope you sleep well tonight. Tomorrow will be good.

# The Bad, the Good and the Ugly

Lucknow is mostly a beautiful city and for the first 5km or so we were able to see some of its wonderful sights. There were in particular some amazing Muslim mosques. We passed both the Bara Imambara and a beautiful entrance gate called the Rumi Darwaza. We may have a photograph taken of me there as well. Lucknow is important, not only for Mughal history but also for British history.

**The mile long cobble section** Lucknow is one of the major centres of what the British refer to as the 'Indian mutiny' and what the Indians, quite rightly call, 'the first war of independence'. The latter is a fairer description. Around the entrance gate, there was a long, maybe a mile long cobble section, which was really challenging on my bike, particularly with my 'paining' wrists.

**The stressful suburbs** We then moved out of the main city and into the suburbs. The suburbs were full of markets and for 10km it was probably the most challenging stretch I had to face to date. I had to be incredibly alert and I was pretty stressed out the whole time. Sachin looked at my heart rate during that period and realised how challenging it was as I wasn't even cycling fast or pushing hard. I wish I had the GoPro camera on.

**Remembering southern India** All of a sudden we came out into the countryside and it made me realise how much I missed the beauty of Southern India and its countryside. As we left Lucknow we came across loads of mango trees and mango groves, so that was around breakfast time at 20km. After that, it was some of the nicest cycling I've done. The road was flat, the conditions were good and the sun was out, I had my music and life was good.

**Abdul and his mango contacts** We then met some of Abdul's friends. One of the many talents of Abdul is that he's also a mango exporter. He introduced me to two of his, I think, partners in the mango exporting business.

They export mangos around the world, including to London. They were explaining to me the different types of mangos that are available, when they are picked and how they ripen in certain conditions. So we had breakfast with one of his partners, and the other one turned up later just to say hi. Abdul is a man of many qualities and many talents, and he's generally a funny and affable man. As I've said before, I'm sure he'll make a wonderful head of his village.

**Abdul and his legal issues** The other thing about Abdul is that in Lucknow, he had a meeting with his legal council, because he's currently taking a legal action against certain government officials. He believes these officials have misappropriated or misused funds intended for his village. His counsel was called 'PL Misra', who is a really nice guy who'd spent around 10 years with the army in Jammu and Kashmir. He was therefore very interested in the fact that we were raising funds for widows in that area.

He wanted to know why we're doing it, how the funds were going to be allocated,

how the widows were going to be chosen and what the criteria was. He was also hopeful for the case that Abdul is bringing as he thought it was a good case to be made against the government officials. It's extraordinary as Abdul is funding the litigation personally and has already forked out a lot of money. The case is due to be heard after Holi on the 13th March, so I'll still be with Abdul. He will let me know what the result is in the high court of Lucknow. So it was an interesting experience meeting PL Misra.

**It's not Tuesday... the monkeys are out** And there are also lots of troupes of macaque monkeys along the road, which are always fun to see and watch. They were different sort of macaque as they had much lighter hair than the ones we have seen previously. They were almost a sort of tan colour.

**Is This The Way to Amarillo?** The two sessions of cycling after breakfast were both good and they were 25km each. The sun was shining and I enjoyed listening to Tony Christie and 'Is This the Way to Amarillo' as well as a number of other upbeat songs. That was cool.

**Taking on 30km in one stretch** I then decided I was going to do 30km after our lunch break just to finish off the day,

because I'd done 70km by that stage. It turned out to be a really, really miserable stretch. The weather completely changed.

The wind was messy and swirling, stirring up all the dust. It looked like it was about to pour with rain and people were running indoors. That session of the day reminded me of the importance of the training I had done over the last year.

### I had to dig deep physically and mentally

I had to dig deep for those 30km. The thing about training is that it needs to be uncomfortable and unpleasant so that you're ready for the difficult times. So basically, for those 30km, it wasn't pleasant, it wasn't nice, it wasn't enjoyable and I wanted it to be over. In fact, I wanted the whole cycle to be over at that stage. I tried to not focus too much on the unpleasantness and just tried to push on and, it was lovely to finish.

**Pass the pattie** I came across a lady who had a cow dung pattie so I grabbed the opportunity to help her and have my photo taken. She passed me a pattie to put on top of the pile. That's how they dry the dung before they use them as a very effective source of heating, whether it's to keep warm, to warm water or for cooking. We have seen these piles absolutely everywhere on our travels, just everywhere.

**Sachin bought a chicken curry** When I was last in Lucknow, before Cycle for Widows, the students from the law college told me they were taking me to see some of the city. They said we were going to take me to see some chicken curry so I was looking forward to lunch.

We, however, ended up seeing chikan kari. It's beautiful embroidery work which Lucknow is very famous for. Sachin went off to the market last night after dinner to buy a beautiful chikan kari sari for his wife, Ashmi.

**Chris Gayle's message** Chris Gayle sent me a message via Instagram that I'd like to share. He makes a reference to my progress, my injuries and getting a butt massage! It's great that Chris Gayle is following my progress.

**Feeling the team love (again)** I had a few issues with my room and my team came to the rescue, again. The team have been unbelievable as they have swung into action. They have helped in a way that is just beyond kindness.



# Day 32

Thursday 5 March

## Route details

From Hardoi

To Agra

Distance 3,200km

Time 4 hours 1 minute

# Will the Coronavirus Cut Short my Journey?

I feel slightly bad (but not too bad) that one of the highlights of the day was leaving Hardoi. I really did not want to go to that town. I needed to press on and I needed a fresh start. In fact, as an almost final word from Hardoi, it decided to rain on me first thing. It was as if it was saying, "Chris, you don't like us, but maybe we don't like you either."

**The Express Way was bliss** Oh my goodness, I did the last 30km on the express way between Agra and Lucknow, and what a difference that makes. It was certainly the finest road I have cycled on so far in this trip. So, a big thank you to the NHAI (National Highways Authority of India). Abdul says the road only opened two years ago and it's wonderful. We're heading now for the balance of the route to Agra, and we're going to stay there for two days. We were originally going to have one day there and then have an interim stop but we've decided against it. We had some concerns about the small towns and hotels we would have stayed in.

**On the other hand...** I've said lots of positive things about the Express Way, but of course, the flipside is that it's amazing how distant I suddenly feel from the surrounding countryside and villages. It reminds me of the song by Vin Garbutt - 'The Bypass Syndrome' which basically talks about people rushing from city to city in cars and not really enjoying the countryside. There was a bit of that, but, I have to say it looked so lovely for a change. The other point was that I had a tailwind and the sun was out, so really, life was good.

**Personal best & (unofficially) beating 4 hours** For the first 70km my pace was relatively slow. It was a single track road and some of the conditions were not good. So I didn't even think about a personal best

today. There are a few occasions where I forgot and left my watch running when I wasn't even cycling. I did the last 30km on the express way as you know and to my amazement, I ended up getting a personal best of 4 hours and 1 minute. Had I pushed a little harder earlier on or remembered to turn my watch off and on at the right times, it definitely would have been a sub 4 hours time. Anyway, as Ed says, if it happens it happens, and I'm not going to try.

## Will the coronavirus curtail my cycling?

Lots of people are talking about the coronavirus and it's starting to spread to India, and it's likely that it will spread very quickly here. People from the wider Loomba Foundation team have been very concerned about my welfare. They have been very sweet in asking whether I should be carrying on in the circumstances, and whether, because I have already covered a significant distance of over 3,000km, it would make sense for me to finish my ride in Vrindavan. We arrive in Vrindavan in two days time, and it's a religiously significant city and, of course, the Loomba Foundation has been supporting widows in Vrindavan.

**I'm not ready to give up just yet** For the moment, at least, I didn't take on this challenge lightly and I hope I'm being reasonable and rational in thinking it through, but I'm not ready to give up yet. I've said to people that the risks on the Indian road, for me, feel much more significant than the risk

of catching the coronavirus. I promise I will monitor the situation and listen to people's advice and decide on the best course of action. For the moment, my plan is still to continue onto Srinagar. I guess people's other concern was that all international travel would be cancelled, and I could be stuck in India for the foreseeable future. I will keep an eye on developments in that respect.

**We saw a moving cremation ritual** We encountered a very solemn and moving experience today as we travelled over a large bridge about 40km outside Hardoi, where we passed over the Ganges. There were a number of cremation sites there, and we were able to stand quietly and watch one funeral. Atul was kindly able to explain some of the things that were happening.

So the deceased was initially taken into the Ganges to be washed and purified before they are carried back and put on the wooden funeral pyre. While that was happening, the nearest relative who we assumed was the son or the eldest son, had his head shaved and then took most of his clothes off to go into the Ganges to wash and purify himself. Various rituals were taking place with the deceased body as different things were placed on the body.

**The build up to the cremation** Atul explained that they were putting curd and then some Ganges water, which is referred to as 'Ganga jal', on the body. They also

added honey and then some ghee. Once all the various things had been put on the body, they then placed more wood on top of the body, to make sure that the cremation worked properly. The final step was to put some straw that would help the fire start. Some straw was also given to the son and he then proceeded to walk around the body while praying. In fact it wasn't too wholly dissimilar to the Indian weddings I've seen where the bride and the groom walk, seven times I think it is, around the fire.

**Lighting the pyre** At the end the son of deceased then lit the pyre and we stood in silence as the fire spread very quickly to the straw and the wood. In fact, there was a really big wind and it was cold, so the fire took hold incredibly quickly.

They actually had to try and reduce the amount of wind and how quickly the fire was burning by putting up a big sheet that they put water on to reduce the speed of the burning. Atul also explained to me a number of other things, but I feel that those were quite personal to a Hindu ceremony, so I won't share them on this blog.

**The hopping horse** We took a video of a horse whose feet had been tied together. There are various ways in which the villagers tend to prevent their animals from running away. Tying their feet together is one way but the horse was extraordinary in the sense that it was almost hopping on its front feet to move down the road. I've seen other ways that include cows or water buffalos that have got big wooden harnesses to stop them running away. There are various other methods to stop the animals moving away too quickly.

**I was discretely handed a tissue** I had my first experience of 'paan' on this trip during one of our breaks. You'll see the paan wallah

putting various ingredients into the paan leaves and me trying it. It's an extraordinary concoction of tastes and textures inside your mouth, and I chewed it for a minute or two but that was enough for me. I was then discretely handed a tissue.

**Thank you Dina... it was worth it!** Thank you Dina, you came good in the end! You took some time to put your fingers to the keyboard, but it was worth the wait. It was great to get an insight into some of your early biography and I really appreciate the descriptions of the songs as well. All your songs are now all downloaded onto my 'Great Songs' playlist and I'm looking forward to listening to them tomorrow.

**A jugaad fan** At breakfast, there was yet another example of jugaad. This time, it involved a piece of wood, on which they had managed to attach a fan. The fan was then attached to what looked like a car battery. That fan was used to blow air into the tandoor oven to increase the temperature. One of the blades of the fan had broken so they need to replace it.

**If I was a kid again...** We came across some kids playing an interesting game. The game involves using two pieces of wood, a small piece of wood and a longer piece of wood. Using the longer piece of wood, the child hits the small stick, which then bounces up in the air. They then have to hit that stick as far as possible and the one who hits it the furthest is the winner. The game is called 'gilli danda' and I have to say, it's the sort of game that I would love to have played when I was young.

**The weather tomorrow here and in Delhi** The forecast for here (Agra) is not good. I hope it's not like Delhi where the rain is very heavy. Pawan sent through a video to show how heavy it is as we are due there soon!



### Damien

Chris –COVID-19 is indeed causing some concern around the globe, but I understand from a (reasonably) reliable source that it doesn't like heat. So exercise, which you currently have in spades, is a good means of prevention – and at the speed you were riding yesterday it won't be able to catch you anyway!

PS. You're looking in good shape physically. I hope that bloody book will include a couple of "revealing" before-and-after poses.

### Camilla

Hello Chris. Quietly following your impressive progress from New York. Well done! As you know, I left a good chunk of my heart in India so reading your blog is a wonderful daily pleasure for me. I can feel everything you describe as if I were still there, so thank you. I hope you can feel the energy we are all sending you, and that it gives you strength in your toughest moments and joy when life is good. Keep going! Love, Camilla

### Carol

Hi Chris, Great to see that you are over the two-thirds mark now. Well done! It is a fantastic achievement so far. And with another PB you are definitely going to be able to stay ahead of whatever virus might be chasing you.... Definitely a greater danger on the roads as you say – those traffic shots really are video nasties.

One of the lovely things about your blog (apart from hearing all about your exploits of course) is that it gives us some amazing glimpses of day to day life in India – thanks for sharing them so well.

PS. loved the photo with the cappuccino – a picture of sheer heaven!

# Day 33

Friday 6 March

## Route details

From Agra  
To Agra  
Distance 3,300km  
Time 4 hours 31 minutes

### David and Holly

The challenge appears to be finding even more ways to test your determination. I'm sure you'll bat it aside with suave insouciance. Tough conditions. Well done for keeping going through it all.

### Dina

Hello Chris, it might have been an awful day for you, but it resulted in a lovely blog! Love the hailstorm 'get the \*\*\*\*\* camera' scene, you really brought it to life. How about instituting evening charades so you can hone your silent communication skills with your team? So sorry about your wrists, they must be unbelievably painful by now. Do take care as best you can. Best of luck for tomorrow. Yours forever in awe.

### Damien

Seems that you are getting to experience (and share with us) truly all that India has to offer. And no doubt the ride wouldn't be complete without it all – so well done for just getting it done. And the fact that you are now planning for the final stages is a promising sign – and makes us realise how far you have come already.

### Camilla

Hello Again Chris. Big support from us here! My favourite Italian love song – Pensiero Stupendo by Patty Pravo. Will think of others too. This one's quite unconventional but I love it.

# Attacked by Massive Balls of Ice

Another day done but it wasn't a very nice day. Today was unpleasant and I mean that with some massive British understatement.

**I learnt a lesson today** Atul was very sweet as usual and wanted me to go and visit the birthplace and the area where Lord Krishna was born and grew up. The area is called Gokul but the road to get there was pretty industrial and incredibly busy. We probably learned a good lesson today, that we need to work on the cycling rather than seeing amazing sites. Otherwise we're not going to get things done.

**Massive balls of ice... ouch!** When we got to lunchtime I had a sleep and then I went back on the highway. That's when India decided to open the skies in a major way. There was lightning, a storm and a wind that I had to lean into to stay upright. The storm remarkably turned into a massive amount of hailstones. So there was a hailstorm with massive balls of ice and I was already drenched at this stage. I thought I would just keep going but the hail got bigger and bigger, that in the end, it was really hurting my hands, my face and my legs. I had to stop and leap into the car.

**Hello, can anyone hear me?** I was screaming at Atul before I leapt into the car and he couldn't hear what I was saying. So he then went running back to the car that was further away to get my sliders and comes running back with my sliders.

I screamed again and he couldn't hear me so he goes running back to the car to get the umbrella. He comes running towards me and I'm screaming again and he can't hear what I'm saying. He finally arrives and I say, Atul, get the camera, we need to film

this! I'm not suffering in silence. I need people to see quite how bad this is.

**The end of the world?** The weather's certainly rather different from the weather that Donald and Ivanka Trump had when they came to visit Agra. I must say that India tends to be rather less attractive in the pouring rain, not least because there isn't really much of a drainage system so flooding occurs really quickly and all of the rubbish and the sewers along the sides of the roads all tend to overflow. It's as if the streets come alive in some end of the world sort of way.

The end of my cycle couldn't have been more different from the cycle yesterday as it was on a beautiful highway with sun and with a tailwind. India had the last word again as the lightning started and the rain started again.

By that stage I had almost finished the last 100km of the day (around 87km) so I stopped and we had a tea and I managed to have a complete change of clothing to finish off the day. We've got a lot of wet clothes in the car because Sachin came out to save me as well and it's now bucketing with rain and Agra's not looking too attractive, unfortunately.

**An extraordinary monument of love** We're just passing the Taj Mahal now and it is, of course, an extraordinary monument of love by Shah Jahan to his wife Mumtaz, who'd passed away. So basically, it's her tomb and a memorial to her. Some strange twist of fate occurred when Shah Jahan's son, Aurangzeb, decided that he wanted power and control,

so he locked up his father. His father spent the last eight years of his life in a prison cell that had a view of the Taj Mahal. We've basically got the view that Shah Jahan had when he was locked up in prison in the fort and we're looking across at the Taj Mahal, which is over the other side of the river.

**Deb, thanks for putting up with me** I'd like to give another shout-out to my wife Deb for putting up with me both generally, and for all the training that I've done for this event. Also for being away for so long at this time, particularly with her broken wrist. I'm reminded of the psychotherapy course that I did in the summer of 2017. And, in particular, on that course, I looked at attachment theory, which was developed by the extraordinary John Bowlby.

So, the theory is that, as a child or as an adult, you hopefully form secure attachments. Once you have a secure attachment, you then feel safe in which to explore the world, whether as a child playing with toys or with friends or later as an adult. There's no question that Deb has helped establish a secure attachment for me, or a healthy attachment for me and a secure base. Thus enabling me to do the slightly crazy things that I do in taking on these challenges and exploring the world.

**Please support me** Thank you for all your support. Please help me to make a difference to the lives of widows in Jammu & Kashmir by making a donation. You can make a donation to JustGiving or to Ketto if you are in India. »





## Amazing tightrope walking 5 year old girl

As I was cycling toward the area of Lord Krishna's birthplace we saw an extraordinary young girl. She's probably about 5 years old, I would have guessed, and she was practising tightrope walking. Atul tells me that in Hindi she would be known as natni. She's just extraordinary. She would've been doing that so her mum could collect money, and Atul gave her some money.

**Good news and bad news** For those of you out there who are wondering how my leg is getting on, you can see it's healing really well. All of the scab has already come off, which is great. The less good news is my wrists are still bad. They're better than immediately after the accident, but not that much better.

Sachin has been strapping them up and this evening we're going to try some deep heat spray. We will wrap them up this evening and see how we go but they're not so good. I guess the problem is that I'm still continuing to put a lot of weight on them as I'm cycling, particularly when the roads are really bad and I'm holding on for dear life.

**My warm shower was heaven** I've just had the most wonderful warm shower in this lovely Oyo hotel we're staying in, in Agra. It was one of those showers that you can only really understand and really appreciate when you're tired, cold, wet and miserable. It just transforms you and it also made me reflect on the fact that many of the places that we passed today and on many other days were dwellings that were no more than a plastic sheet draped

over some branches of a tree. The people who live there certainly don't have warm showers or have anything like it. I can't even begin to think what it must be like for them out there now as I dictate this. Almost all of the villages that we've been passing through and many, many of the dhabas and things survive off hand pumped water through a bore hole.

You think that might be a rare thing in some remote village, but they're everywhere. They're in towns, villages, by the sides of the roads, in dhabas. So many people in India still rely on pumped water. And when I stop at the dhabas, I see the lorry drivers bathing, and you might think, 'Well, that's nice,' but they're bathing in great open bathtubs, great open water tanks, and most of the water tanks are covered in mildew and things, so they're washing in what can only be a) really dirty and b) diseased water, but that's their day to day life.

## Lovely meal & wise advice from Pratap

We had a lovely evening with Pratap Singh and his wife, Mrs Santosh. We had a delicious home cooked vegetarian meal. Pratap was originally Head of India for the Loomba Foundation and Atul's boss until he retired. Pratap was in Delhi until recently and has been able to bring some warm clothes from Delhi, which I'm definitely going to need based on today's weather experiences.

He also gave me some wise counsel in relation to the last stretch into Srinagar. We discussed the risks and he encouraged me to do some loops and then take the car for

the last section. That is before cycling into Srinagar, given the tensions in the area. I said I would reflect very carefully on his advice because it was advice that is relevant not only to me but also more broadly to the team.

## Friday/ Saturday nights in Cardiff

In terms of songs today, I enjoyed listening to Nina Simone- 'My Baby Just Cares for Me'. The memory relating to this song was from my time studying law in Cardiff and it reminded me of a nightclub that I used to regularly go to on a Friday or Saturday evening. I can't remember which day now but I used to go with Will and Paul in particular.

The reason why that Nina Simone song was so pertinent was because it was the song that was played literally as the lights were turned on, like at the end of the school disco. So it was a bittersweet song. I liked the song, but it felt like the evening was only just getting going and, suddenly, it ended. That song will forever be with me as the end of another weekend evening in Cardiff.

**Thank you Dina, hello Camilla** I have also been enjoying listening to the selection of songs that Dina recommended. Thank you Dina! I see that Camilla has popped up from New York – how wonderful. Its good to have some support from the US. Camilla, I need some recommendations for Italian love songs. Dina has come good so I need you to come good too.

PS I notice that I'm now nearly as far north as Nepal and Buthan which, I have to say, has come as a bit of a shock to me.

# Day 34

Saturday 7 March

## Route details

From Agra  
To Vrindavan  
Distance 3,400km  
Time 4 hours 15 minutes

### Dina

You don't look that different to me. However 79kg does sound somewhat skinny. Shouldn't you have loads of heavy muscles by now?

### Tomas Furlong

Thank you for more honest and entertaining posts. Keep it up!

### Clive

Well Chris it certainly looks as if you're losing weight which will make the cycling easier! Glad to hear it's going well. High time you listened to some decent music not all these sloppy love songs. Try some military marches – last time I was in Delhi there was a military band practising for a parade so it'll be most appropriate as you near the capital and it'll keep your legs turning at a good cadence.

### Damien

Another impressive day in the saddle, Chris. And amazing to think you've been doing this for more than a month! No wonder you're getting further north – even with some loops. I do hope your day today (tomorrow in the blog) was a safe one. Vrindavan near Holi sounds rather chaotic...so I'm particularly eager to read the next blog too. And Kam knows his stuff. So much of a good day out does depend on having the right clothing – so kudos to your team for ensuring you haven't got to worry about that.

# A Day of Reflection on the Bike

The warm clothes from Delhi did not arrive a moment too soon as this morning was cold. For the first 75km, in other words for most of today, I cycled in winter socks, winter gloves, one or two layers on top, my new reflective jacket, a thermal turtle neck and a thermal hat underneath my helmet. So, the weather in India at the moment is remarkable as it almost doesn't look like India. It almost feels like autumn in the UK.

### Overcast day but the roads were great

The day was overcast and it felt as though the road was constantly moving upwards. The good news was that we were on a really good quality highway, I think it's called the Noida Expressway, which runs from Agra to Noida, which is a new satellite town just outside Delhi.

**Wise words from Kam re clothing** On the clothes front, I remember Kam from RM cycles, which is my local cycle shop, saying to me, "There is no such thing as bad cycling weather, there's only bad clothing." That was certainly true today because I have the right clothing, and, despite the cold, damp, gloomy conditions, I was very content.

**The sun came out for the last 25km** The last 25km after lunch were a delight in comparison and the sun came out. I was able to just cycle in my cycling for widows cycle shirt. Sachin joined me and we had 25km of very pleasant cycling. It seemed like a different day, it seemed like India had deserted me up until 75km and then re-joined me for the last part of the journey.

**Looking forward to tomorrow** It's going to be a very very busy weekend because Vrindavan is near to Delhi and a lot of people travel there from the capital. It's the weekend, it's a Saturday and it's nearly Holi, which is a very important festival to the followers of Krishna. So, for all of those reasons, I think Vrindavan is going to be

heaving. I'm looking forward to seeing many of the religious sites tomorrow that Atul is keen for me to see. Atul added the following regarding Vrindavan:

*"Vrindavan is a holy town in Uttar Pradesh, northern India. The Hindu deity Krishna is said to have spent his childhood here. It's home to temples, many dedicated to Krishna and his lover, the deity Radha. At Banke Bihari Temple, the curtain in front of Krishna's statue is opened and closed every few minutes. At Radha Raman Temple, a gold plate beside Krishna signifies Radha." – Atul*

**Widows in Vrindavan** The Loomba Foundation has also been doing work in Vrindavan and Mathura. Atul is going to say a few words about the work they've been doing with widows in these areas. It is also his favourite city in the whole world and incredibly important from a Hindu perspective.

*"This project was in partnership with Lions Clubs International. We empowered 500 widows in Mathura and Vrindavan. We gave them training in garment making for two months and after they successfully completed the training we gave them a foot operated Singer brand sewing machine free of charge. The widows now have an opportunity to earn money and to educate their children. Their children no longer have to earn money by washing dishes in dhabas (roadside cafes) or do cleaning work in shops and restaurants." – Atul*

### A lovely surprise to hear from Camilla

I'd like to give a shout out to Camilla, who I mentioned yesterday as she left a comment on the blog. It was an enormous and lovely surprise. She was my trainee and she married an Italian and then moved to Italy, only for her husband's job to take them to Mumbai. She called me at the time so I could brief her on India and Indian life. I told her I love it but it's not for everybody and it can be challenging for some people.

My real thoughts were that Camilla wouldn't adapt to India and an Indian way of life, and we used to tease her. When she was my trainee she was the only person I knew who as a child had lessons in deportment. Her mother insisted that she learn to walk and carry herself correctly.

### I was wrong about Camilla and India!

How wrong I was about Camilla. She absolutely adored India as it absolutely got into her blood and she loved it. She didn't live an expat life as she really got involved in a number of India related projects and had many many Indian friends.

I know, from what she said to me, that even though she and her husband and children have gone off to New York for their next posting, that a large part of her was left in India. I know that that's why she has been enjoying my blog so much. Camilla, thank you for the song recommendation. Please send me more when you can.

### **For many people, this is the real India**

I was reminded again of real life in India when speaking (Atul was translating) to the security guard outside the hotel this morning. This extraordinary man who stood outside the building all night traveled to work on his old Hercules bike and he cycled 35km in the evening and 35km back in the morning after his all night shift. So that's 70km every day on his old Hercules bike and I'm sure he would've been paid next to nothing acting as a security guard outside the hotel.

**Mum's birthday is on Monday** I've been thinking of my mum today as it's her birthday on 9th March, which is on Monday, so I listened to Charles Aznavour who is a popular French singer of many years ago. I listened to the track 'She' in particular. Her other great favourite was Andy Williams, and I was listening to 'Raindrops Keep Falling on Your Head', which I know is one of her favourites. It brought back memories of her listening to the radio in the kitchen, and in particular, BBC Radio 2 with Terry Wogan and Jimmy Young. She adored both of them and I think of her when I think of them.

**Memories of film scene and dad** Talking of 'Raindrops Keep Falling' reminds me of the film, Butch Cassidy and the Sun Dance Kid and it also brings back memories of my dad. That song was sung during the scene where Paul Newman is riding a bike with Katherine Ross. She's riding on the handlebars, and it's just a wonderful, carefree moment. I mentioned that because my dad used to think that he rather looked like Paul Newman and frankly, on his better days, he actually did.

**The importance of a clean out** I was also reflecting on my bike today about Alcoholics Anonymous and the 12 steps that I've been through and that all members go through. I was reflecting in particular, on my life and the importance of doing a full stock take basically. It's important, not just to be honest with yourself about alcohol, which for many years I wasn't, but also with other aspects of my life that were less attractive. It's important to really clean out everything.

**Letting go...** It's important to clear out everything because the temptation with many of us is to hang on to one or two things that become deeply embedded.

We don't want to let them go even though we know they're not good for us. I recognise that I need to let go of everything.

**I'm looking older than my age!** When I met Pratap Singh and his wife yesterday evening, I walked in and he asked me how I was and I said I was pretty good, but tired. In his wonderfully straight-forward way, he said, "Yes, you're looking older than your age at the moment, Chris," which was a little discouraging, but understandable.

Sachin, bless him, tried to come to my rescue by saying that I looked worse not only because of my tiredness, but because I had lost weight. It sounded positive, but he then said that my skin was hanging off my face and hadn't firmed up at all. So that was the other reason I was looking old. I know he meant it well of course.

### **Hello, where are your weighing scales?**

Pratap was also surprised as one of my initial requests was whether he had a weighing scale. I don't think he had a visitor arrive and ask for a weighing scale, ever in his life. So we all stood in his front room while I weighed myself. Pratap wasn't quite sure how accurate the weighing scales were, but based on those, I seem to be around 79kg. I will try to weigh myself properly when I get to Delhi and will report back then.



# Day 35

Sunday 8 March

## Route details

From Vrindavan  
To Vrindavan  
Distance 3,500km  
Time 4 hours 25 minutes

### Atul Palta

Hey Sachin!! What a blog... it cannot be any better, full of beautiful thoughts. I feel beautiful thoughts comes only out of a beautiful person. I have no words to express how wonderful you are in taking care of everyone's need in the team.

Thanks for being a part of team K to K. I really want to thank you for helping all of us especially me n Chris everywhere for everything.

### Kritika

Lovely blog Sachin! I feel like I know everyone on the team personally now.

### Roddy

Sachin, thanks for your lovely blog: we feel connected to you through this and much better than Chris droning on

### Seamus

This is such a fascinating cross-section of India, at many different levels.

### Clive

Yes I agree Roddy!! Great to hear about the team from you Sachin! One question; I've never seen Chris dancing in the office Or at clients' offices – will he be doing so once he's back at work??

### David and Holly

Great blog Sachin. Lovely to hear your side of the whole adventure. We shall remember to treat Chris as the sunflower he is from now on. David and Holly x

# The God Complex

My name is Sachin Mali and I am writing today's blog. I am a professional physiotherapist, specialising in muscular, skeletal and sports injuries. Right now I'm working for the sports authority of Karnataka which is run by the local government in Bangalore. I am from Sullia where I was born and bred, and where my parents live. I live and work in Bangalore with my wife, Ashmi.

## The 'magic hands' nickname is dead

When I did the 30 marathons in 30 days with Chris in 2015 I was known as Sachin 'magic hands' Mali. This name has changed as they now call me 'god complex', as I decide, I lead, I dominate and I expect the others to follow! I have many roles but my main responsibility is to act as a physiotherapist for Chris. Apart from that I'm also working as a fitness trainer, a nutritionist, a cycle mechanic and I also try to be a good team member.

## How I got involved in Cycle for Widows

Chris emailed me two years ago saying he was thinking of cycling across India for the Loomba Foundation. He didn't say which month and asked if I was interested in helping him like I did before. I didn't actually respond to Chris' email. After two years I got a call from Atul to say that it was definitely on and he asked if I was interested. I said I wasn't sure. The main reason is that my wife is an engineer and she works for a US based corporate company. She is a network engineer and works in the evening from 5pm till 5am in the morning.

**India is not safe for women at night** India is not safe for women at night and my wife works all night. Sometimes she is asked to work until 2am or 4am in the morning so coming back home is a challenge. She is new to Bangalore and it is a challenge for her as a woman to be working at night. Therefore, I was not sure if I could spare the time for

this event. A month later I decided to ask my wife to see what she thought. She agreed with the difficult situation we faced. Also, she's not completely independent as she was pampered by her parents so I had some concerns on how she would cope on her own for 45 days with the house, work and so on.

**We decided I could go** After discussing it for three days with my wife we agreed I could go. I informed Atul and I was really happy to be a part of Cycle for Widows. It's a great experience working as a team and facing a big challenge, and cycling will be easier than walking.

## Learning how to look after bicycles

I realised that Atul had arranged for Chris to use two bicycles and that he was ordering them from Bangalore, which is my home city. I told Atul I could help with the bicycles seeing that the bikes were being supplied in my home city. He didn't need any help but he told me I could help with looking after the bikes once we are on the road. I went to the bicycle store to get training on how to service bikes, fix them, change wheels, adjust seat height, how to handle them and what to do in the event of an accident. It was really useful to learn all these skills.

**Chris is a...** Chris is a very kind and humble person. As a person, Chris is open to anything and is very flexible. If I ask him anything he will happily accept it and he hardly says no to me, which is the best part! For any doctor or any for someone in the

medical profession, they always want a good patient. A good patient is someone who communicates well, behaves well and who understands and cooperates. Chris in that regard is outstanding. He makes my job easy.

**He is respectful** Chris works in India and has travelled the country widely so he understands the Indian mentality. He is respectful too in spite of some of the things we (here in India) don't get right, which I really admire. He never looks down on or underestimates anyone because of their religion or culture. He is curious and keen to understand Indian people even if they are sometimes mischievous. He is always interested in the why.

## Chris, the dancer & full time entertainer

Our team is very lively and happy and it's mainly because Chris is always happy and smiling throughout the day. He entertains us by laughing and cracking jokes. He sings songs, dances on the road, dances while cycling and he even dances on his breaks. He makes us smile and I would say he's a full time entertainer. I have cycled with Chris many times and I enjoy our conversations.

**Atul is a close friend** Atul is a wonderful man. He is so friendly and I feel so comfortable with him. I think of him as a close friend and he knows what Chris wants and what the team expects. Atul was also with us in the previous 30 marathons fundraising so its very easy to work with him day to day. He knows what time to start, »



Day 35 *cont*





where to find hotels, how to book the hotels and he's very good at communicating with people.

#### **We all missed Atul but Chris especially**

We missed Atul when he went back to Delhi for 15 days. When he wasn't there Chris felt very lonely and he was going into a sort of depression. When he came back, I could see a charm in his face and the best thing about Atul is that he keeps talking to Chris. As a physio, I talk to Chris about things like his knee, his wrist and his back. I ask if he's OK but when Atul speaks to him it is different. They speak about his family, his friends, hotel, accommodation, food, the Loomba Foundation, the blog and so on which helps to divert Chris' mind. He also makes Chris laugh a lot and he understands his humour.

**I'm in the car with Abdul** I am in Abdul's car when we are on the road so I know him well. He is a humble man. He is not just a driver as he's also very social. He is a very good friend and he likes to play around a lot. Abdul is a very good driver and respects the highway code. He's great at estimating our arrival time when we have to travel to the hotel or elsewhere.

#### **Mahadev is great looking after Chris**

Mahadev is a nice person but I don't know him as well. Firstly, he's on his phone a lot and when he's not, he's helping Chris. He cleans his shoes, the bike or he's helping Chris with something else. We don't therefore get much of an opportunity to bond. He's always giving Chris a massage and when it's a break he wipes his body and the sweat from his face. When we take a break Mahadev is always the one who removes all the gear from his body and packs everything into the car.

**I wasn't expecting the sore butt!** We have come across a couple of problems in terms

of my physio work. The first problem was the sore butt on the third or fourth day, which surprised me as he said he'd already been training for a couple of months. It took a week to heal and he got new shorts so he was more comfortable. He then fell off his bike, bruising his knee and damaging his wrist. As a team we've managed to deal with his knee well but the wrist is taking longer to heal as there is deep soft tissue damage. It's not healing quicker because he keeps his wrist extended all the time.

**Neuropraxia** In the first week he also had a problem with his finger as it started going numb and feeling tingly because of a trapped nerve. Trapped nerves are common amongst cyclists. He developed a condition called neuropraxia but I'm sure it is temporary and when he finishes the cycling it will be fine.

**Today's cycling... we did a loop** We started cycling a bit late today, it was 7:45am rather than 7:15am. The temperature was very cold and it was completely foggy outside. Chris was feeling very cold, he wore full length cycling pants, thermals, a t-shirt and a wind/waterproof jacket. He wore full hand gloves, a head cap and winter socks to keep warm. Chris hates cycling in cold weather. On this trip we have seen all sorts of weather like extreme heat, hot and humid, hot and dry, very cold, cold and misty, foggy, rainy, a thunderstorm and yesterday we had a hailstorm.

**Chris is a sunflower** Chris is like a sunflower. He's charmed when the sun kisses him as he opens up. He flies like a dragon fly and as the day ends, his mood slowly goes down. As soon as the sun has set, he is completely tired and exhausted.

**The first 15km today** The first 15km today was a big challenge because the roads in Vrindavan weren't very good.

There were lots of potholes, mini cobbles, people honking unnecessarily and people shouting for no reason. It was very noisy and the traffic was heavy so it was difficult to complete the first 15km. The remaining sessions were easy because we entered the highway. Chris gets really exhausted when he hits the cobbles at speed because his wrist and shoulders suffer. It was cold too so he didn't enjoy the morning session. After breakfast and tea he came out of the restaurant and the sun was out so he was happy and wanted to cycle.

After breakfast we headed towards Agra. Chris was in luck today as we visited Soor Savora which is a bird sanctuary near Agra. We also visited a wildlife SOS bear sanctuary. The latter is a centre where they rescue bears from all over India who have been found, abandoned or ill-treated.

**The Kalandars and bears** In Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh there is a tribal community called Kalandar (Kalandar means bear entertainer). They catch and use bears to earn money by travelling to different towns and cities, using them as entertainment. So these centres take bears from the Kalandar communities to rehabilitate them. The centres pay the Kalandars money to help them gain employment and earn money in other ways.

The wildlife centre also had a huge pond where we saw some big fish. We saw many bears, as well as langurs and macaque monkeys. A volunteer who worked at the centre explained how they treat the animals. He said there were a couple of bears who were blind, there were twin bears and one was in quarantine because it had tuberculosis. A couple of bears had been rescued from the Kalandar community. The best aspect of this place is that the bears are free to roam and are not in cages.

# Day 36

## Monday 9 March

### Route details

From Vrindavan  
To Delhi  
Distance 3,600km  
Time 4 hours 34 minutes

**The headwind slowed me down!** So for 50km after breakfast and up until lunch, there was not only an elevation all of the way, but more importantly there was a direct head wind. Normally I cycle on average at about 23-24km but today I was down to 15/16km per hour and really pushing hard. I'm feeling pretty drained now even though the sun is out and the sunflower is still open.

**Getting under 1,000km** I was making good progress at one stage today and during a break, I thought a little Indian dancing would be in order to celebrate getting under the 1,000km mark. We are down to 900km left.

**Goodbye UP, hello Delhi** We've now finally left Uttar Pradesh (UP) and moved into the National Capital Region of Delhi. So we're now in a separate region, having been in UP for what feels like forever. It feels significant being in Delhi because it's a place where I spend a significant amount of time. The sites are already looking very familiar and friendly, and the sun is shining still so I'm still smiling.

**Uttapam 'Indian pizza' for breakfast** This was my breakfast today and it was called Uttapam and it's rice batter which we've had separately. You may have seen this used for

# A Slow Ride to Delhi

Another day done, so that's 36 days, 3,600km. It was a difficult day even though I was on the excellent Yamuna Expressway as I had my first full on headwind.

dosa and masala dosa, but this was much much thicker and had some tomatoes and peppers on it. It's known as the Indian pizza. It was incredibly filling and it was served with Sambhar and coconut chutney.

**Beautiful things come out of...** I also want to comment on Sachin's wonderful blog. I'm extremely grateful to him, both for writing the blog and for his wonderful comments about the wider team. Also for being with me and being such an incredibly vital member of the team and a delight. As Atul rightly said in his comment: "nice things come out of nice people"; or more poetically: 'beautiful things come out of beautiful people'. So I consider myself extremely fortunate that Sachin is part of the team.

I'm not sure that my family will recognise Sachin's generous description of me, although perhaps they would accept that I do like being a comedian, even if my humour is inappropriate a lot of the time.

**Penblwydd hapus i ti** I want to give a big shout out to my mum as it's her 81st birthday today. I've sent her some messages by text, and I hope she's having a happy day. A massive thanks to Jo for looking after her so wonderfully well and giving up everything to do that. I'm just so sorry that my mum can't be more engaged in life.

Being confined to one room, moving from a bed to a chair and from a chair to a bed, can't be much fun. So a very happy birthday

mum! Penblwydd hapus i ti. Perhaps I could get Paula to phone her up and sing 'Happy birthday' in Welsh.

**Holi festival** Atul's excited about being able to spend a couple of days with his wife and son, and will be able to play Holi with them. Holi is a two-day Hindu festival that is just as important as Diwali which is the festival of light which is in the autumn.

On the first day people gather around a bonfire and celebrate good triumphing over evil. The second day is when perfumed powder called gulal is pelted at everyone and made to stick with water pistols and balloons. Holi signifies the victory of good over evil and is celebrated as a way of spreading happiness and love.

Atul went off early this morning to the main temple in Vrindavan to partly to celebrate Holi, but also because he wanted to find it open so he could do puja (pray).

**Being manhandled by the ladies from Nepal** Yesterday we also spent some time in the birth-place of Lord Krishna, who was actually born in a prison cell, and we were able to walk through the prison cell. All cameras and electrical equipment was confiscated so we weren't able to take any pictures but it was absolutely moving. While there I was jostled big time by some tiny ladies from Nepal, who were no bigger than 5 foot tall but they had no problem dealing with me. If I was in the way, they would just

barge past me and knock me out of the way.

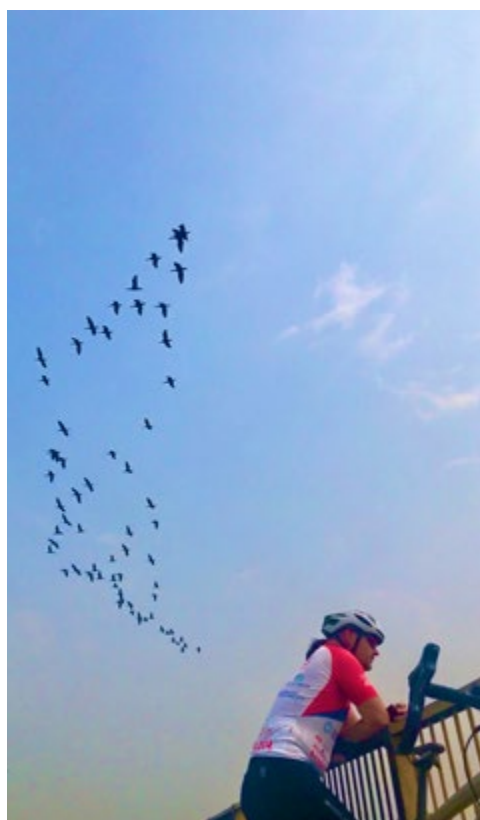
**I was struck by the excitement in the temple** We were also able to play Holi (throwing colours at each other) with Mahadev today. As a sort of general point I wanted to mention what an incredibly religious country India is and what an important role religion plays in their lives. I was very struck when we went into the temple which contains the birth-place of Lord Krishna.

How incredibly excited the visitors were, all with their shoes removed. Many of them dancing, and it made me think that the Christian faith in the UK could do well to take account of the enthusiasm and love that I witnessed, and the approach to faith.

**I've got 10kg extra fat!** When we were doing the 20 minute warm up this morning. I asked Sachin, how is it that Atul and I are about the same height and roughly the same body build, but I am 10kg heavier? Sachin in his wonderful straightforward way simply said "you have more fat, both external fat on your body, but also internal fat around your organs"

So there we have it. I've got 10kg extra fat on top of Atul's portion, so I need to deal with both of those. I'm certainly pleased that I'm moving in the right direction.

**Bears do really like porridge** I really enjoyed seeing the bears yesterday and



Sachin covered it in a lot of detail in yesterday's blog. The only thing that I wanted to mention, was the fact that they're fed on a concoction of food, but essentially, it's porridge. It sounds almost like a sort of joke from the fairy tale of the three bears and Goldilocks, but apparently they love porridge, so there we have it.

**Inhumane treatment of poor bears** Just wanted to say a word about how the poor dancing bears were treated. Using bears for entertainment this way was banned a long time ago (1972) but the practice continued, especially in Rajasthan. The very informative volunteer from yesterday explained that when the bears were young, with a boiling iron, they would create a hole through the nose of the bear. They would then feed a string through it and they would intentionally keep the wound raw, so the bear would be in pain much of the time, thus making it easier to train them.

When we were in the bear sanctuary we could see the bears still had very seriously damaged noses from the ill treatment they got. Apparently you no longer see any dancing bears in India and I understand the practice still continues in Bhutan and Nepal.

**Thai tonight with Harjiv** We're hoping to meet up with Harjiv Singh this evening, who is one of the Loomba Foundation Trustees. We're hoping to go for a Thai meal for a change. Mahadev is also excited because he's off to see his family, so there are lots of happy people in Delhi today.

Thanks again to Sachin for such a beautifully crafted blog. As Roddy my mate at HSF rightly said, it was great to hear from Sachin rather than me droning on as usual.

### David Scott

Well done Chris, brilliant to have dropped below 1,000km! What's it like cycling through Delhi? Hopefully your route takes you through some interesting parts?

### Roddy

Wow: new State (Union Territory), sun, Uttapaman for breakfast and only 900km to go!! The Lord God Shiva is surely smiling down on you right now. Take care

### Damien

Must be good getting onto some "home ground", but there really is nowhere to hide in a headwind... Keep your head down and the pedals turning – and the wind will soon be at your back, no matter which way it's blowing.

### Anonymous

900kms to go!! It's been such an incredible journey to participate in vicariously. The blog has allowed us to have such rich insights into the stages of the ride.

I've especially loved the artistic photography and comradery of the team. It certainly has influenced my thinking – especially the day you had to dig deep to find the blessings of the day (I've dubbed it the butterscotch ice-cream day) which reminds me to find the moments of beauty in each day. But it's also encouraged me to get on a damn bike and cycle – so this week I start spinning! Keep safe Chris and may there be many more triumphs and blessings along the way.

### Dina

Loved the picture of the camel, and the one of the temple which was so atmospheric! Made up for having to watch a video of you dancing; it's not got any better. Enjoy the continuing countdown tomorrow.

# Day 37

Tuesday 10 March

## Route details

From Delhi

To Delhi

Distance 3,700km

Time 4 hours 14 minutes

# Living it up in Delhi

So, Delhi decided to smile on me this morning and the sun was shining from the first moment.

**A perfect day to be on the bike** Today's ride took us on, basically from New Delhi out to Noida and then to Greater Noida and back again. It was reasonably flat although Sachin seemed to think there was some elevation in it and the wind was mostly kind. The sun was out all morning and it clouded over in the afternoon but it was a good day of cycling. It's strange cycling around Delhi on Holi because it was a little bit like a ghost town. There was almost no traffic and I've never seen Delhi so quiet. The express way to Noida and greater Noida was incredibly quiet as well so it was good from a traffic-free perspective.

**A car literally brushed past me!** The only nasty moment today came when Mahadev was trying to protect me, as usual, driving somewhat in the middle of the road because of where we were. Rather than driving behind me, he was in the middle of the road. A car came up very fast behind us and swerved on the inside and literally brushed past me. It really really scared me. I'm always nervous around Holi time because people take a drink with what they call a 'desi' drug in it. It's a sort of country drug called bhang which is a cannabis type drink.

**A 'full English' and a sneaky cappuccino** As it was Holi everything was quiet. Everything was closed and it meant all the dhabas and restaurants were closed. We ended up having to go to hotels for breakfast and lunch so that was an extra treat. So for breakfast I had full English

cooked breakfast and some HP sauce which was rather nice for a change. I even sneaked in a cappuccino and then asked Sachin if I was allowed to have a second cappuccino. What he didn't know was that it was my third so I had three cappuccinos as well as some toast and marmalade. I was really living it up. The hotel was in the centre of Delhi.

**The nicest zzzzz to date** In Greater Noida we went to the Radisson Blue and we had lunch there which was great. I ended up sleeping in a small patch of their garden. I think it was my nicest sleep. (I know the name 'Radisson' will bring a smile to the face of my friend Allan Montgomery – no more said!).

**Pampered galore and a death mask!** I went to a barbers that Abdul recommended. As I've mentioned before Abdul is very connected in Delhi. All the hair salons and barbers were closed in Delhi today because of Holi. In that wonderful Indian way, Abdul was able to call his friend and his friend was able to call the barber who opened up the shop especially.

So Abdul, Sachin and I all had our hair done, our beards trimmed and, our ear hair done, our nose hair done and our eyebrows done. I had a strange massage which can only be described as some jugaad. Abdul was still having work done on his hair and his beard which was taking a long time so the guy persuaded me to have a facial (using a hand massage machine) so I

looked like a ghost, or at least it looked like some sort of death mask.

**Baba garam pani tanda** I cracked my first joke in Hindi yesterday because we were struggling with water in the hotel. We were assured that we would have water in 5 minutes. There was no hot water in 10 minutes, no hot water in 15 minutes, no hot water in 20 minutes and no hot water in an hour. There was no hot water at all and it was the same story in the morning. So my joke was 'baba garam pani tanda', so I was hot/cross and the water was cold. The guys appreciated my attempt at humour in Hindi.

**Sachin bounces off the road** Sachin was on the spare bike and using the phone at the same time. I can't remember who he was calling, maybe it was Mahadev, and he was probably discussing arrangements for breakfast. He managed to catch his front wheel in a rut in the road and he flew off. Mercifully, Sachin was largely unhurt. He's a lot younger than me and seemed to bounce on the road rather than smash onto it like I did. I'm sure he'll be sore in the morning and his knee looks a bit sore as well but he didn't nearly cause such a big a fuss as I did.

**Yes, yes, yes, yes... no!** So this is a picture of a hotel called Le Grand Regency hotel which Sachin had found and he called up and asked if they were open for lunch. They said yes so we went and met the security guard who was there. We said 'are

you open for lunch?’ and he said “yes.” We went in and spoke to the receptionist and said ‘are you open for lunch?’ and she said “yes.” We went to the restaurant and saw the waiter there and said ‘are you open for lunch?’ He said “yes.” We walked into the kitchen and said ‘are you open for lunch?’ The chef said “no.” Incredible India, only in India could that have happened.

**Dinner this evening at my favourite hotel** I’m going to a dinner this evening hosted by Professor Raj Kumar at the Imperial hotel where I’m the guest of honour. The other people at this event included Justice Michael Wilson (Hawaii Supreme Court), Justice Matthew Cooper (New York State Supreme Court) and Ms Melissa Brophy as well as Atul, Abdul, Pawan and Sachin.

**Fantastic achievement by Jindal Global Law School** Professor Raj Kumar kindly hosted the reception in Kanyakumari on the 2nd of February, the day before I started cycling. He will be in particularly fine form as his law school, which he’s the vice chancellor of, has been ranked as the number one law school in India. It’s also the first Indian law school to ever be ranked in the top 150 law schools in the world. This is a very extraordinary achievement and he should rightly be enormously proud of what he’s achieved.

**Holi message from Pawan’s family** Pawan kindly shared a video of his family and friends wishing me a Happy Holi.



**Siew Boon Lou**

Hard to imagine Deih without traffic. The silence must be deafening. But good for cyclists. Enjoy your dinner.

**David and Holly**

Even in an empty city you manage to nearly get knocked off your bike. Apart from that it’s starting to look too luxurious. Facials, head massages, cappuccinos? We’ll all start thinking this is just a holiday. But I’m sure they will be a few more challenges before the journey ends. Another great read and I loved the video at the end. Happy Holi!

**Max**

Keep it up Chris – you are almost there! So impressed to see how far you have come thus far and I have been impressed by your bravery when I have watched some of the videos showing the condition of the roads and the heavy traffic. All of that said, stop moaning about the cold showers – they really are good for you, nothing like a cold shower to get the circulation going to start the day... May I recommend you download some Marcus King music to keep you company on the road at some point and to warm your spirit following your next shower.

**Camilla**

Hello Chris, a fully deserved day of pampering! Thank you for providing us with a unifying, lifting experience, as we live your Indian adventure with you. It’s wonderful to think of India through your blog, particularly now as we are so sad that Italy is on its knees and we can’t go back there next week as planned. Keep it up and keep us posted!

**Savy**

Some good pictures there, Chris and glad to hear Delhi was a treat. Almost at the home stretch now! Best wishes.

# Day 38

Wednesday 11 March

## Route details

From Delhi

To Karnal

Distance 3,800km

Time 4 hours 17 minutes

### Dina

Chris, this blog has everything; politics, social studies, history, animal rights, and the real reason why Brits like vindaloes. Very well done on getting through another day and all the best for tomorrow.

### Nicholas Peacock

Into the last week Chris. Wow!

### David and Holly

I did wonder if you'd put on a sprint to win some sort of jersey; but then I noticed your heart rate looked like you were asleep. Thanks for clearing that up. The map looks like you're getting into the far north of India now, an incredible distance travelled.

### Damien

Another remarkable day. The other stat I noted from your Garmin feedback, which is presumably a sign of things to come as you push to the finish, was that you managed to spend the whole day climbing – albeit very gradually! No doubt some interesting profiles in the days ahead...

And speaking of profiles, if you have to lay your social media profile low for a few days, so be it – much better for you to be safe and to complete the mission started an amazing 38 days ago, and the final blog will no doubt be a cracker!





# I Won't Forget the Indian Hospitality

The route today was direct from Delhi to Karnal and the conditions were pretty good. It was a bit overcast, so the sunflower was a little bit droopy, but there was a favourable wind most of the time. The only challenge was that the road was very busy, which Abdul said would be the case.

**I reached 76km/h on my Garmin** Those sharp observers out there may have picked up that my Garmin shows that I did 113km in total today, which is right. The reason is that for the first time ever, I forgot to turn off my watch after I'd done 76km prior to lunch. There were no dhabs near so we put my bike on the back of the car to drive to a dhaba and my watch was still going.

Therefore, for that distance, my Garmin was still running, so I had to do an extra 13km to make sure I did 100km. People who look at my stats closely will realise that the 13km prior to lunch, I was travelling at rather a fast speed. My top speed was 76.9km/h.

**Another miracle on the road** At least one miracle occurs each day to keep me safe on the Indian roads. A car passed me so closely today that I can't believe it was able to judge whether it was going to hit or miss me. I know what it's like to pass a cyclist in a car, and you normally can tell whether you're a bit too close and normally that means, you're probably one or two metres away.

**The 1mm miss masters** I think the car today was closer than any car previously, they must think that they've actually hit me! So it feels nothing less than a miracle that I've kept safe each day. Sachin's view is that Indian drivers have mastered the 1mm miss, it being a required skill on the Indian roads to be able to squeeze through tiny gaps, so he just thinks it's part of India, but I have to say I'm a little bit doubtful.

**How can that be??** This lovely man worked at the dhaba that we stopped at for my 50km break and Sachin in his usual way was ferreting around and managed to find old scales that they use to weigh vegetables. He was convinced that it was very accurate so he asked the guy whether we could use it. The guy looked at me and said "Maybe 78/79kg"

His ability to work out how much I weighed was unbelievable. Much more to my horror, he said that he was also 78/79kg and I thought he was joking so I said get on those scales and show me! To my amazement and horror, he was indeed 79kg. So me and this lovely man weigh exactly the same. How can that be??

His explanation was that I was slightly taller. I reckon I was probably about 3mm taller. That did not explain the difference.

**Other people's challenges** I asked Sachin to take a picture to give you an idea of what the lorry drivers often bathe in, the morning around breakfast time which is an open tank of water. This one was at the back of the dhaba where we had our mid morning break, and it's just covered in mildew. They would stand there, strip down to their underpants, get a full lather up of soap and then wash it all off using a mug which they dip into the water and pour over their heads.

Again, a reminder of what challenging lives many people around the world live.

This is me en route today in front of a temple. The statue on the left is of Lord Shiva and the statue on the right is of Hanuman the monkey god. In fact we see many statues like this along the routes from Kanyakumari, some of which are enormous in scale and maybe five times bigger than the ones behind me.

**"This is my brake!"** Sachin took two pictures of a camel outside a dhaba and the camel was being used to encourage people to come in. Sachin was excited about seeing it and taking photographs until he noticed there was a great spike protruding from the camel's face. He asked the camel keeper what it was, and in fact the whole face of the camel had been pierced with this metal rod. Like the bears, the rod had been placed through it and was kept raw so that the animal would suffer and do exactly what its keeper wanted. When Sachin said "what is it?" the keeper laughed and said "This is my brake!". I hope there will also be a rescue centre for camels that are treated this way.

**Flying dhabs** There were two airplanes that we passed which Sachin reliably informs me were being converted into dhabs. I'm aware that there are people in the UK who have bought planes and have actually fitted them out and are living in them.

**The wonderful generosity of Sunil** I met a wonderful man called Sunil Sharma and he is the owner of Aman Dhaba which is where we had lunch. After lunch Sachin »

### Hemant Kumar

Good Afternoon Chris and Team. Another a great blog which included haryanavi and punjabi tarka. Hope you and Sachin will have to enjoy the taste of Haryanavi and Punjabi food during the cycling. Now the count down is start. Well done and Keep it up. Please do take care all of them.

### Priya

Stay safe Chris and keep on biking and writing these amazing blogs! Nearly there...

was searching as usual for a place for me to sleep and found somewhere at the back in a room that was partly built and it obviously wasn't so nice. So Sunil said "Why don't you come with me?" and led us to a separate building and said "This is my bed, you can sleep in my bed".

**What I will remember most** How many of us would give up our bed for a good friend? Family member? A paying guest? A neighbour in need? Maybe some of those would be a challenge. But how many of us would give up our beds for a complete stranger, who had done nothing more than eat £2 worth of food in your dhaba? That is true Indian hospitality and it's that, that I will remember perhaps more than anything during my ride.

**We are now in Haryana** In terms of where we are in India: not long after leaving Delhi we entered Haryana which is a new state and along with Hindi, the language here is Haryanvi. Interestingly, the capital of Haryana is the same as for the Punjab namely Chandigarh and I think when the Punjab was separated in 1966, Chandigarh was made a separate city state so it could act as the capital for both. Chandigarh is famous for being the only planned city in India which was planned by the great French designer le Corbusier.

The language here is Hindi and Haryanvi, but I don't think I mentioned when we were travelling through Uttar Pradesh for so long, the language there is both Hindi and

Bhojpuri. In fact that is the language that Abdul speaks as well as Hindi of course.

**My thoughts on Kashmir** I was asked about tackling Kashmir's hills and the reality is that I've not really thought about it that much. I just concentrate on one day at a time. The only general point that people have raised with me about Kashmir, at least the last 100km before Srinagar, is the danger because of the tensions. Somebody suggested yesterday that for the few days prior to getting there, I ought to cease all social media activity. So I need to think about that and I need to think about the security aspects more generally as I mentioned in a previous blog. In particular I'm in touch with the Chief Justice of Jammu & Kashmir, Gita Mittal and we're liaising with her about questions of security.

### India's diversity & Sachin's three

**languages** It's always a reminder to me of how incredibly diverse India is because Atul often teases Sachin about the quality of his Hindi, but I'm willing to forgive anything on the basis that the only language I speak is English whereas Hindi is actually Sachin's third language. So his first language is Kannada which is what they speak in Karnataka, his second language is English and his third language is Hindi, so he's certainly forgiven in my book.

**You distract the mole while...** We saw this advert at our lunch stop for some cream which is referred to as a mole distractor. I'm not quite sure how it works, but maybe

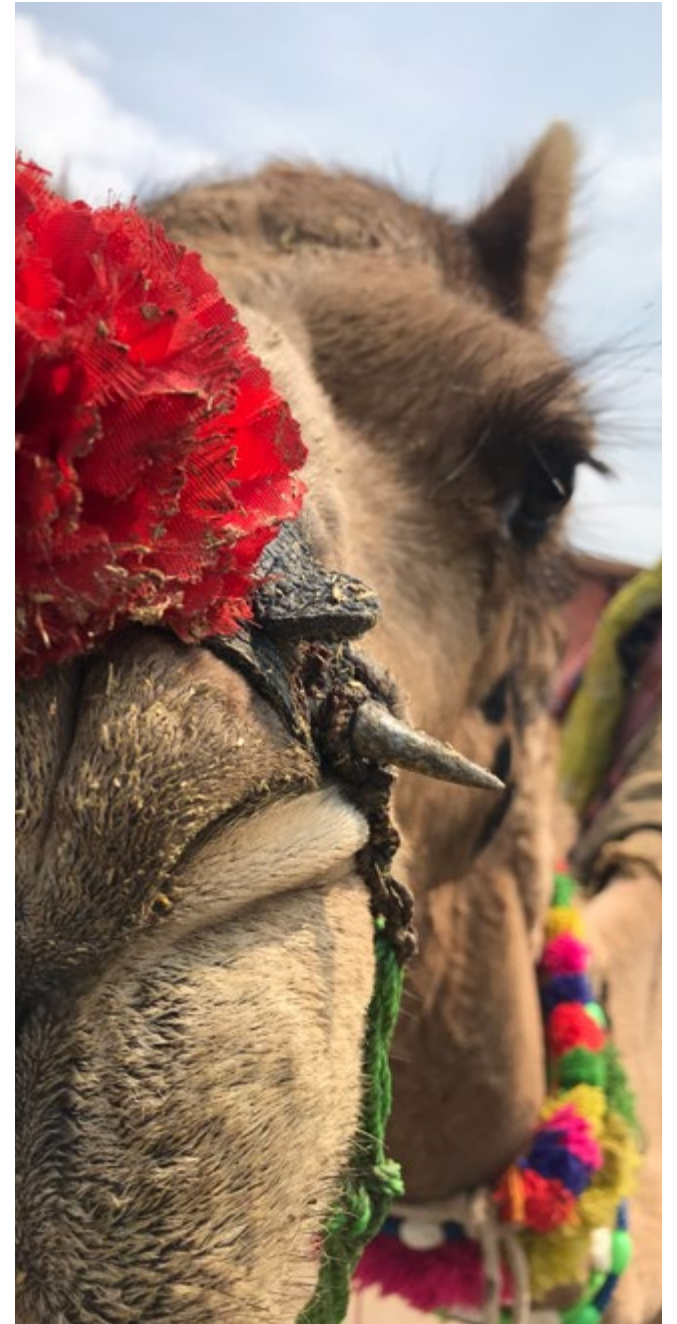
somebody removes the mole when it's looking the other way.

**Jindal law school** In fact the road out of Delhi today, after 42km took us very near to the O.P. Jindal Global University which Professor Raj Kumar is the Vice Chancellor of. It's based in a place called Sonapat and if we had more time, I said we would pop in and have breakfast with Raj after our lovely dinner last night.

**Justice Sikri and his judgements** A gentleman at last night's dinner, was a wonderful man called Justice Sikri who is a retired judge of the supreme court and is enormously respected in India. Professor Timothy Endicott teaches a joint programme with me at various law schools in India and often refers to the constitutional law judgements of Justice Sikri.

**Widows and their libido!** Justice Sikri was also incredibly knowledgeable about the plight of widows in India and some of the challenges they face. He listed a number that I knew, but the one I didn't know was that he said that widows were also not allowed to eat spicy food, which completely puzzled me. I asked him why, and he looked slightly abashed but explained that spicy food was thought to encourage the libido.

By having bland food it's meant to quell the imperious urge of these poor ladies. In passing, my own imperious urge is quelled by a significant pressure on my perineum from my hard racing saddle!



# Day 39

Thursday 12 March

## Route details

From Karnal

To Rajpura

Distance 3,900km

Time 3 hours 59 minutes

**Coronavirus... my mind is in a complete whirl!** But I have mixed feelings today. My mind is in a complete whirl as I feel like I'm in a proper dilemma. The challenge is great but of course tough, and I'm loving being part of this extraordinary team with Atul, Sachin, Mahadev and Abdul. Four amazing people. The reason for the dilemma of course concerns developments on the coronavirus front. I feel like the world is closing down and I know The Loomba Foundation are concerned both for my wellbeing and also the implications for flights back to the UK and possible quarantine issues.

### **Lord Loomba asked me to stop/ fly home**

I spoke to Lord Raj Loomba today for the first time in a long time and perhaps the first time on this trip. He has been incredibly supportive and both he and Lady Loomba have regularly passed on their best wishes through Atul. He's also sent a number of really nice WhatsApp messages. I know he is concerned about my position and his strong recommendation is that I get to Chandigarh, which is near, as soon as possible, fly to Mumbai and fly back to the UK.

**I made a personal commitment** I think he would love it if we were in the armed forces and he was my commanding officer

# I'm Going To Continue Cycling Despite Being Asked To Stop

Day 39 done! I'm obviously very very pleased that I broke the four hour barrier for the first time. The roads were pretty good for most of the way and the wind was either a cross wind or a north westerly wind, so that was favourable. It was only ever going to be in circumstances where both the road and the wind was good where I could break four hours. I did four sections of 25km each and so it was great to finish the day on a personal best as well as breaking four hours.

as I know for a fact he would be giving me a direct order. I respect his concern and I have listened very carefully to his advice but part of my dilemma of course is that I've made a personal commitment, in the process of raising \$320,000, that I will do everything I can, to cycle from Kanukamari to Srinagar. And therein lies my problem. There is also a piece of me as you can imagine that having got this far and desperate to complete this challenge, and I know the team is very supportive and will do whatever is necessary to help me achieve that.

**Will I get into Jammu and Kashmir?** I'm also due to go on holiday with my family shortly after I get back to the UK, and that adds a complication as well. So I'm monitoring developments here in India and I'm monitoring developments in the UK, and globally. Raj has also mentioned that most institutions have closed down in Jammu and Kashmir and is concerned as to whether I am even able to cross the state border. So I'm in touch with the Chief Justice of Jammu and Kashmir, Gita Mittal, to find out what the position is on the ground.

**Not forgetting the tensions...** Quite apart from that there are ongoing tensions between India and Pakistan in relation to Jammu & Kashmir and the separate

concerns people have got for my safety so I'm also taking that into account. I think I've mentioned previously some very clear advice that I should be shutting down all social media activity soon if I am planning to get to Srinagar because we don't want to draw attention to this project and increase the risk that we'll be a target in some way.

### **Monitoring the situation on daily hourly basis**

I'm going to make decisions with input from the team on a daily basis even possibly on an hourly basis. For the moment at least, the plan is that I will do another 100km tomorrow, so at least I've got to 4,000km. We will have another team meeting tomorrow evening based on the facts available.

**Deb is being very supportive** I've just had a long chat with Deb and she wants me to do the right thing and is very supportive of me continuing if that is what I decide to do. I've agreed with her that I need to monitor matters. She has recommended that I get some advice from my law firm, Herbert Smith Freehills, in London and also from the Foreign Office which I will do.

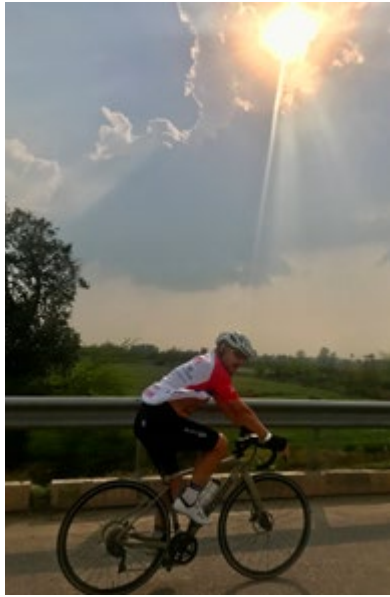
**My sons cycle 100km** My sons, Ben (middle son) and Sam (eldest son), decided to cycle 100km in one day to support me

and to keep my spirits up. Please watch the fantastic video they produced.

**\*\*UPDATE\*\* Final destination likely to be Jammu** I've read the Foreign Office advisory and they are advising not to go to Jammu & Kashmir other than to Jammu. At the moment at least it looks like the furthest I can go is Jammu. As I've already said I'm going to monitor matters on a constant basis. The team is completely behind me which is fantastic. Deb is behind me as are all my family.

**We are in the Punjab now** We have left Haryana and we are now in Rajpura which is in the Punjab. So what I have noticed in terms of changes? Lots of people are wearing turbans. There is no question that Haryana and the Punjab are more developed states that some of those we have gone through. The dhabas are much bigger and smarter than many we have been in before. The roads have increasingly got more foreign cars, including Audi, BMW and Mercedes. The countryside looks like it is being farmed on a more industrial scale rather than a small holding scale.

**More evidence of diverse nature of India** Being here is another reminder of the diverse nature of India. Uttar Pradesh is



developing but has historically been behind. The BJP government has been encouraging the various states to compete with each other for investment, etc. The government has been publishing information on each of the states based on development criteria.

**Free buffalo milk** We met a man on the road today and he is a vet in fact and his son is a top tennis player in India. He was desperate to do anything he could to help and he wanted us to go and have lunch with him but we didn't have time. So the one thing he was able to do was to give us some freshly milked buffalo milk which he had got only that morning. The guys have had it boiled and is now available for our tea and coffee. I think I mentioned that Abdul's favourite chai is with buffalo milk straight from the buffalo's breast.

**Man on walking pilgrimage** I met Baba Nirmal Das today and he was on a padayatra, basically a walking pilgrimage. He is 86 years old and seemed enormously robust. I'd love to be as fit and healthy as him at 86. He said he left home at the age of 12 and has been travelling on and off ever since.

So all he had with him was a mobile phone in his top pocket, a metal container which is a tiffin container with some food in it. Separately I'm holding a metal rod which might have an official name, but it's got round

circles at the end that he uses to knock against the metal which he does while chanting at the same time.

**It's like being 'in' a zoo** We got to our resort hotel this evening. The caging is all around the resort and it overlooks some lovely fields. Right next to my room is a straw home and the people in the home are cooking. There was smoke billowing from various gaps and you can imagine what an extraordinary fire hazard it must be. There's no question at all that we are the ones in the cage as the villagers peered at us. We are the strange creatures staying in a building that was once part of their field.

**No run for me** Sachin was keen to go for a run but because I had pushed so hard to break 4 hours, he knew I wasn't up for it. So he and Atul went for a run while I sat doing my blog. This gentleman is a magnificent Punjabi with a lovely beard and would have been carrying on with village life in the same way that they have been doing for centuries I've no doubt.

**A mixed day of emotions** It's been a day of mixed feelings. I'm delighted at reaching 3,900km and overjoyed about breaking 4 hours but with the dilemma of the world shutting its doors and the implications it has for the cycle and me. That could potentially mean leaving India and/or being quarantined.

### Dina

Chris, there are two unwritten contracts here. One with yourself which is short, and simply says 'I will complete the cycle'; you will be gutted if you don't but the fact is that around the world many people are being faced with circumstances which are robbing them of such wonderful feelings of achievement; not exactly a consolation, but you are not alone; and one with your supporters; I can assure you that one has a very helpful implied force majeure clause which has been triggered; your supporters will be disappointed for you, not by you.

### Carol

Chris, another amazing day and more amazing people along the way. The 4,000km milestone is there for the taking now. Wow. Take care of yourself and the team – maybe it is time to take a lesson from Shakespeare "What fates impose, that men must needs abide; It boots not to resist both wind and tide!"

And, for all of the disappointment, if you have to finish the ride there, it will be on a high and there is Karma at work – you have just broken the 4 hour barrier, and after your 30 marathons over 30 days, it will be 4,000km cycling over 40 days... What a journey of body and soul!

### peterchater@gmail.com

Chris, whilst I love reading the daily blog over a cuppa, I'm looking forward to hearing more about it in person and certainly won't be asking for money back :)! I appreciate it's a tough call, but you've got lots of wise counsel and I know you'll do what makes the most sense to you. Take good care and catch up soon.

### Damien

Chris – another extraordinary day. What a privilege for you (and your team) to have had these experiences. The road has many forks, but you no doubt have the experience to know – instinctively or through the wisdom of all the amazing advisers with whom you are connecting (including HSF, which I am reliably informed is also a source of great wisdom!) – which ones to take. And no doubt you are turning all the options over in your mind whilst you grind out the last few (hundred) kilometres in the saddle.

But should the right decision be to disband the current team and return home, having seen the wonderful support video of Ben and Sam riding 100km in solidarity... I can think of no better back-up team to help you complete the final days of your mission back in the UK (nor better alternate final chapter for that bloody book) to achieve your committed 4,500km – and at the same time add another pillar to the bridge between India and the UK.

# Day 40

Friday 13 March

## Route details

From **Rajpura**

To **Ludhiana**

Distance **4,000km**

Time **3 hours 50 minutes**

**One tricky bit today** There was only one tricky section coming up to my morning break where Abdul and Sachin went off the main road to find a place to have my morning fruit and nuts and physio, only to find that the road was absolutely jammed.

There were lorries, other traffic and great pools of water so they couldn't find anywhere to stop that was sensible. So in the end I got so cross that after 5km I went back onto the main highway and managed to find them much later about 10km down the road, so I'm pleased I didn't stick to that awful side road.

**Another personal best** Despite that I was able to do a personal best. The last 22km of the day were more challenging because the tailwind turned into a swirling wind, which meant that I had to really push hard because I knew I was on a good time and I wanted to achieve that.

**Go home as soon as possible was advice!** So that was the sweet part. The bitter part was that we had a team meeting last night and another team meeting first thing this morning and I've very very reluctantly concluded that we need to bring things to an end sooner rather than later. The news about the dangers within Jammu and Kashmir was

# A Bittersweet Day in Spite of Reaching 4,000km

Today was bittersweet. Sweet because today we passed the 4,000km mark and because I was able to smash my personal best that I achieved yesterday of 3 hours 59 minutes with today's best of 3 hours 50 minutes. The conditions were pretty much perfect today for the first 75km as the wind was either neutral or a cross wind, or at times behind me, and that was fantastic. The road was mostly good and I had Mahadev close behind me to protect me from the traffic.

obviously very relevant, but also, through Deb I've been in touch with a good friend of ours who is a very senior government doctor in the UK. His advice in relation to the coronavirus is that I should get home really as soon as possible because things are expected to escalate considerably.

## I didn't want to put the team in danger

As you can imagine Lord Loomba is very pleased with my decision. In relation to the security position in Jammu and Kashmir, I've been told that the road, in particular from Jammu up to Srinagar, is a very dangerous road. The current background is that the Indian security forces have had a lot of success in dealing with insurgents.

The terrorists have suffered considerable casualties and are looking for any way in which to strike back at India. As someone rather brutally said to me: "Chris, of course you're not important" (which I thought was a bit harsh!) but I would likely be considered a tasty morsel from a kidnap/ransom perspective.

So given that whilst I might be willing to take the risk, it's clearly not fair that I should put the team in danger. I obviously don't want to embarrass the Loomba Foundation or the British government.

**One last 100km to achieve 'K to K'** So the long and the short of all of that is that tomorrow will be my last day and what I've agreed with the team is that I will set off really early, about 4am. It's about 280km from Ludhiana which is where we are in the Punjab, through to the city of Jammu, and what we'll do is set off early in the car to cover the distance and then once it's light I will do 90km and then travel again in the car and then do the last section to cycle into Jammu itself, and then that way I will at least have achieved the K to K. In other words, Kanyakumari to Kashmir.

## Thank you for supportive comments, as usual

I really appreciate people's incredibly supportive comments, in particular how understanding people have been. I think I have come to terms with the decision, albeit with a heavy heart over the course of the 100km today. It all feels a bit unreal really because obviously I psychologically got myself to a place where I was cycling 4,500km in 45 days arriving next Wednesday, so it feels psychologically very strange to think that I'll be finishing tomorrow, namely on Saturday.

**I'm sorry** The plan is that I will fly to Mumbai on Sunday and fly back to the UK on Monday. So I'm sorry. I'm sorry that my

journey is coming to an end a little early. I'm sorry for the team who have been so fantastic. I'm sorry to all of you who have been following my progress and joining me vicariously through the blogs and I'm a bit sorry for me as well but it feels like the right decision, so now that it's made, I feel a little bit more at ease.

**'Sweet' Punjabi food** This was my delicious breakfast and one of my best so far. The boiled eggs I normally just have with salt, and Sachin says you can digest them much more quickly and easily than having them as normal, so I've been having lots of hard-boiled eggs. The other thing was a chef's special paratha, so stuffed with a whole host of different goodies.

The Punjabi's are a) famous for their food and b) famous for their parathas for breakfast. I've got my left hand on a sweet lassi because apparently that's also a great favourite of Punjabi's although I wasn't able to drink the sweet lassi because that was Sachin's and I'm under instructions not to be able to take on too much sweet stuff.

**Crash involving a cow** This was an extremely rare sight in India, and I say that because Indian drivers will do anything to avoid cows and water buffalo on the roads. »



As people will know, cows are sacred in India and allowed to roam absolutely anywhere. This sad sight involves a massive lorry that has clearly hit and killed a large cow and has then spun out of control and crashed so I very much hope the driver and any passengers were safe. My guess is that it happened last night because there was another enormous thunder-storm last night with lightning and then more giant hailstones.

This strange weather is continuing. The hailstones were so loud they woke Atul up at about 3am and he couldn't get back to sleep. I certainly heard them, but I was able to get back to sleep which is fortunate. So my guess is that the accident would have occurred in the early hours of the morning when the visibility would have been terrible. I can only imagine, assuming the driver is alright, how horrified and upset he'll be that he killed a cow. I suspect he'll be less worried about the damage to his vehicle which I have to say looked like a complete write off.

**Nap time** I've had many extreme sleeping places over the last 40 days, but this was particularly unusual. It was round the back of a dhaba next to a series of motorbikes, knackered old sofas and in front of an Ace digger. Anyway it's all the same and once I'm in my cocoon I'm very happy and I slept solidly as usual.

**My AA sponsor's lovely message** I had another nice private message from my sponsor in AA today (he's been extraordinarily interested and supportive during the ride) to say that there are times in one's life when you need to just float down the river rather than trying to swim upstream, and as you can see I'm following that advice today.

**The Punjabi warriors** Punjab is a state. It's so clearly obvious that I am here! I didn't think any state would be quite so obvious so the majority of people are wearing turbans and suddenly their build is completely different. Much bigger. Much bigger hands, very robust individuals. No wonder they were the great fighters within the Indian army. The great warrior caste, and of course Atul is also a Punjabi. Pawan is a Punjabi and significantly Lord Raj Loomba is a Punjabi, although I think the Punjabi genes of heightened strength may have missed some of them!

**Please list all the cities and towns...** I had a challenging moment as I checked into the hotel in Ludhiana. Atul normally does all of that for me but he arrived early to arrange the press conference and the meeting with the widows. I had to check in on my own and various forms were put in front of me which, despite me being tired I was diligently filling out until I came to the question that said: 'Please list the cities and towns you've been in in the last 28 days?' at which point they had to almost drag me away from the counter as I was about to explode.

It was a bit of a John McEnroe moment, "you cannot be serious!" but Sachin in his usual calm delightful manner, pulled me away, sat me down and said "Chris, I'll deal with it" and of course he did beautifully. I have much to learn from both Sachin and Atul and I promise I'll work on it.

**The 40 day K to K diet plan** The other big news is my weight! Finally, finally, after 40 days it's called the 40 day K to K diet plan which I have to say I don't recommend to anybody, has finally properly started working! I think it took all of that time for the exercise and the exertion to really get stuck into my long overdue stores of fat, and I am

now a little under 78kg which I don't think I have been for over 5 years, so I'm really pleased about that.

The other thing which I know will amuse my family and in particular Deb, is that I'm going to try and use this as a new start to healthy living and so my two thoughts on this (which Deb will I know call immediately 'Oh no! not another bee in his bonnet') is that I'm thinking of becoming a vegetarian and separately trying to give up sugars, sweets, cakes, puddings etc. One of the reflective moments that I've had is that this is potentially the fittest I will ever be and I know my boys will think that's a depressing thought so I will try and make a commitment to upping the type of exercise that I do when I get back so that I can remain robust into old age.

**The reception this evening** There were six widows at the reception and it was held at the Park Plaza in Ludhiana and Atul, Pawan and Hemant had done a wonderful job in organising it. There were loads and loads of press present. Atul gave a presentation on the Loomba Foundation and an explanation as to what I was up to. I spoke about why I was an ambassador of the Loomba Foundation and why I was so keen to support widows and their children in India.

**Amazing work by the widows** The widows had brought examples of their work, which were amazing, and I think, probably, by far the best quality of the work that we'd seen done by the many widows that we'd met along the way. It shows something of the entrepreneurial instincts of the Punjabis that each of the widows, we were told, had actually opened small boutiques to sell their products. One lady had done so well that she was able to send her son, who is now 20 years old, to college in

Montreal in Canada. So, that's just the sort of empowerment result that the Loomba Foundation so desperately wants to deliver in India.

### Meeting Lady Loomba's nephews

As an extra treat, Lady Loomba's three nephews came to the press conference and reception. I had a chat to each of them and they told me they were avidly following my daily blog, so that was nice. All of them had families and lived in Ludhiana.

### An update on my ailments

1. Bottom – all good
2. Knee and leg – all good
3. Nerve problems in the fingers on my right hand – not good
4. Tissue damage in my hands and wrists – not good

**My wrists have got worse** Sachin has had to tape me now for the last few days, because my wrists are actually getting worse because they're constantly under pressure from cycling and, in particular, whenever I hit bumps and potholes, of which there are many on the roads in India, they worsen, but I'm hoping that, once my cycling's over, all my ailments will be sorted.

**My end destination today** Would you believe this is where I ended my 4,000km odyssey in India? It was right in the middle of yet more construction works in the city of Ludhiana, taking off my cycle shoes and my helmet and all the rest of the kit. You can see quite how close Indian drivers are prepared to go. It's one thing when I am still, you can see how close they were, but you can imagine what it would be like if I'm travelling at speed on my bike and people are passing me that close. »



## **Nigel**

I am very glad you are going home to your family, Chris. You have succeeded brilliantly and to any extent that matters you have wholeheartedly achieved your objectives. Proud of you! Very best wishes.

## **Paula**

Enjoy your last day but go carefully – we all lose concentration on the last piste! Right decision and wonderful to have participated in the wonderful reception with the lovely widows of Ludhiana. Go Chris!

## **Roddy**

Chris, don't be sorry, you have nothing to be sorry for. Please try to enjoy your last day in the saddle and with the team and mentally prepare yourself for the end of your latest great adventure. Whilst I would say hurry home to the UK, you do realise absolutely nothing is happening here today (Saturday) no sport at all and a number of us in self-isolation. Oh for the freedom of the roads... take care.

## **Narayan Iyer**

Congratulations Chris – this is a truly fantastic achievement. You have no reason to be sorry and should return to the UK with your head held high. You have made the right decision about your return. I have been following your blogs with fascination and just want to say thank you for your incredible efforts and the wonderful highlights.

## **Clive**

4K and K2K is a fantastic achievement Chris well done!!! No need to worry about calling it off early, it's the right and sensible thing to do for you and the team. Congratulations Chris and it's a tribute too to your fantastic team who we've got to know so well over the weeks – great job everyone. Roddy you're right there's nothing to do here – apart from riding a bike!!!! Chris you can do the final 500km pottering around here W/why not???

## **Damien**

Chris – the perfect ending to an amazing story of societal contribution and personal commitment. And most importantly, the results of your efforts have raised awareness and will change (many) lives. Honto ni otsukaresama deshita.

## **nidhiriwrites**

This is sad to know that you are having to cut short your planned trip. But I am sure the decision was taken with everyone's best interests in mind. You definitely have raised awareness for the Loomba Foundation. I came to know of the foundation through your ride when you rode past me on my cycle. You were cycling to Delhi on Greater Noida expressway. Now many of my friends also know about you and the foundation.

In fact, you crossed me while I was on my 150km ride from Aligarh-Delhi. Over the Holi weekend, I did 309km Delhi-Aligarh-Delhi, involving two days of 150km rides. I will be writing about this trip on my blog and I shall definitely mention you and your cause, Chris.

## **Dina**

Hi Chris, yes indeed no need to be sorry, and just think how really lucky you are that your trip was cut short by so few days; what rubbish misfortune you could have had, had you been Italian and had to abandon the ride two or three weeks ago. It also sounds like your wrists and hands need some looking after so it's good you will have time to see to that in the U.K. before your holiday.

I grew up hearing my father say whenever things went wrong which they often must have because I heard this a lot, 'todo es por bien' ie it's all for the good (it's in a weird type of Spanish). I do now think there is truth and a lot of comfort to be had in that way of thinking. I hope you and your fabulous team enjoy every second of tomorrow which should be a wonderful celebration of what you have all achieved together.

## **Priya**

Bittersweet indeed! What a day and such a tough but right decision to take. I echo what most have said Chris – you have nothing to be sorry about – be proud!!! We all are and so would 1000s of others be. Good luck for the homestretch- be safe, take care (hope your wrists and other injuries begin to heal soon) and come home to your family! Warm regards and salute, xx



# Day 41

Saturday 14 March

## Route details

From Ludhiana  
To Jammu  
Distance 4,100km  
Time 4 hours 20 minutes

## Clive

Well done Chris and team wishing you all safe journeys home to your families and safety through this current virus crisis too.

## Anonymous

Congrats Chris! Amazing effort, it has been fantastic to see and learn so much from your blog. See you back in London after your break.

## Mum and Jo

Congratulations dear brother what an amazing journey and you are looking so fit and well. keep the spirits up and enjoy the family back in the uk. love Mum and Jo xxxxxxxx

## David and Holly

Well done Chris, Atul, Sachin, Abdul and Mahadev. We've loved following your adventure and it's been a daily joy to read the blog and to share the journey with you. May you all find your ways safely home for some well deserved rest and may your Gods bless you all.

## Becky Roberts

Congratulations Chris and team! Such an amazing achievement. We have loved being on the journey with you and reading your blogs every day. Safe travels back to London!

# From Kanyakumari to Kashmir, *Mission Accomplished!*

Well, last day done, strange, but the significant thing is we've arrived in Kashmir (J&K) and as we cross the border into Kashmir it was as if the air suddenly became cleaner, fresher and colder. So please close your eyes and breathe in deep and also think about endings because this is an ending (and I learnt from my psychotherapy course that I don't deal with endings so well).

As we crossed the border in the distance there were some hills, not terribly clear but in the distance and then behind those hills were clearly mountains and that of course is what Kashmir is famous for. Kashmir perhaps being the most beautiful of all the Indian states.

**Sad I can't see more of Kashmir** And therein lies some sadness of course because I'm not going to see more of it. In the early part of the day my mood was down, it was raining as we set off for the first 5 or 10km, but as soon as we crossed the border there was genuine excitement. I just want to explore more. I guess it's the perfect excuse (though I'm sure Deb won't approve) for me to return for an adventure on a Royal Enfield motorbike to explore Kashmir properly and explore Ladakh as well. We've now come so far that we're considerably further north than Mount Everest and Nepal.

**Some proper hills today** You can see, if you have a look at my stats, that I encountered some proper hills today, but sadly the mountain climbing would only have come between Jammu and Srinagar. I'm really sorry that I can't give those mountains a go, you stick the bike in a low gear and head down and just push on. It will need to wait for another day.

**We were lucky with the weather** Overall, we've been very lucky with the weather today as the forecast was for rain. I know it's been pouring in Delhi with more hailstones and I know there was a storm with hailstones in Jammu last night. The forecast was for rain today and we just had a small period of rain. Afterwards the sun was out for a lot of the time although it was much cooler, but it clouded over towards the end of the day when we finished. After finishing the cycle and driving into Jammu, it's a reminder of how lucky we've been with the weather. It's absolutely chucking it down so I would not have wanted to cycle through this I can tell you. A dark, dark sky with flashing lightning.

**Dangerous roads ahead** At lunch we met some army officers in the Indian army, two captains and a major, and the major confirmed that the road from Jammu up to Srinagar is dangerous so that was further evidence (if any were needed) that we made the right decision in not moving on.

**A reception this evening** My friend Justice Gita Mittal, who was going to receive me on the 16th of March, is sadly not around today. She is the chief Justice of Jammu & Kashmir but she's kindly sending along a man called Jawad, a senior judge in the district. We'll be meeting him at 7pm this

evening, so she's kindly arranged for him to meet us and I'm very sorry to miss her as I'm extremely fond of her. She's a wonderfully hard working, thoughtful, caring judge and India is very lucky to have her.

**\*\*UPDATE\*\*** We were received and welcomed with flowers and a gift by Justice Jawad and Justice Sharma. Justice Gita Mittal had kindly arranged a dinner on the basis that I was due to be here on Sunday and Monday and she'd arranged a dinner on Monday so big shout out to her.

**Another Loomba Foundation success story** I was also met by the Loomba Foundation coordinator Sunil Raina. He's been working for the Loomba Foundation in Jammu & Kashmir since 2004 when they first had a project to support the children of widows. What was wonderful was that he brought with him one of the early beneficiaries, a young man called Sagar, who was one of the first recipients of a Loomba Foundation education scholarship I think back in 2004. He's now working successfully as an engineer in Delhi. So he had returned from Delhi to his home town of Jammu, especially to meet me which was so sweet of him.

**Widows need help in J&K** In fact Sunil also wanted to organise for me to meet »





lots of the scholars that had been recipients of the Loomba foundation funds for the children of widows. However, I think since yesterday, there's a ban on all gatherings because of the coronavirus, so that was a shame.

Of course Jammu & Kashmir sadly has a disproportionate share of widows because of the tensions between India and Pakistan, and the activities of the terrorists in the area. That is why it's great that the money that I've been fortunate to raise due to the kind contributions of so many people is very much needed in Kashmir.

**Pushing me up to the last km** Sachin wasn't prepared to go easy, even on my last day. That said of course, he's done the most extraordinary job on my body, in keeping it in good condition, and I feel as good today as I did at the beginning. In fact, as you can imagine I feel better today that I did at the beginning, feeling very strong and fit, and my flexibility has unquestionably increased as a result of Doctor 'Magic Hands'.

**Thank you Harjiv/Gutenberg, all sponsors and donors** Thank you to our media partner Gutenberg and Harjiv Singh in particular for all the support they've given to the Loomba foundation over the years and in particular for the help they've given us for the cycling for widows project. Thank you to all the corporate sponsors who have given so generously, and just as importantly, everyone around the world who's given to the cause of the Loomba Foundation, and on this occasion, for the benefit of widows and their children in Jammu and Kashmir.

## **Jez & Claire**

Another brilliant effort Chris, very well done. Although you may be sad that this adventure is over, you can reflect on many fabulous moments and encounters and the good and positive difference you have made to many individual lives in India. Furthermore, you still have a lot give and more adventures to have. We wish you and Deb many more years in warm and sunny climes. xx

## **Dina**

Fantastic achievement Chris, you should be very proud, you have again shown amazing willpower in getting through this challenge, and many congratulations to your team for all their hard work; their skills and kindness were clearly invaluable to the success of this endeavour. They should of course be commended for putting up with you for so long.

We will miss the lovely wake up blog, full of beautiful touches on Indian life alongside the daily record of hiccups, weather movements and neuroses!

Safe trip home and all the best to the team. Lots of love

## **Gavin D**

Chris, very many congratulations to you, Atul, Sachin, Abdul and Mahadev. An extraordinary journey and a huge achievement. What a team! It's been such fun being "on the journey" with you through your posts. Many of your reflections have given me pause for thought, as I'm sure they have for your other readers.

I much enjoyed your concluding 15 points (I love a well ordered, thoughtful list, as I once had an inspirational supervising partner at HS in the early 90's who trained that into me...). Your reflections on plans, not being in control and accepting change are particularly resonant for us all at the moment. Travel home safely, and I hope that you manage a well earned and restful break with your family, as do Atul, Sachin, Abdul and Mahadev too, All best wishes

## **Nicholas Peacock**

Well done Sir. What an achievement and adventure.

## **Paula**

Feel quite emotional that your journey has come to an end so can only imagine how you feel, Chris. But when one adventure finishes, another begins and I am sure that you will start planning again soon. I hope that you have a smooth trip home. Take care and look forward to seeing you!!

## **Matthew White**

Well done Chris! An awesome achievement and thank you for the fantastic blog. Enjoy a well-earned rest now – although I bet you will miss being on the bike tomorrow.

## **Damien**

Bravo. And thanks for sharing the journey.

## **Jane Court**

Extraordinary achievement. Many congratulations Chris and team. Hopefully knowing how many lives you have changed for the better will help you move more easily through this tough 'it's over' stage. Congratulations.

## **Siew Boon Lou**

Congratulations on completing 4,100km. Massive effort by you and your wonderful support team.

## **Carol**

Great job Chris and the team – a fantastic achievement! It has been lovely to be able to follow your journey – physical, mental and spiritual – day by day on the blog. And so pleased that you were able to exceed 4,000km and finish your K to K journey – maybe you will have to make up the extra 4 days on your Peloton when you are back in the UK! Have safe journeys back to your homes and families. xx



# My Reflections From the 41 Days

1. I recognise how incredibly fortunate I have been to travel with, be supported by, and to form a close bond with Atul, Sachin, Abdul and Mahadev each in their own way, showing me considerable love.
2. Being able to see how the work of the Loomba Foundation helping widows throughout India has clearly brought the reason for me doing the cycling, the fundraising to life. Being able to hear directly from them on the challenges they face and how they've been supportive with skills training has been important.
3. I've spent a considerable amount of time on NH44 which carves its way through central India but the reality of course is that what I've really witnessed is aspects of Indian life that have – in many respects not changed for centuries – I've been able to see and interact with Desi (country) people leading Desi lives.
4. I always recognise that the sun was important to me, but this trip in particular has brought out that it seems to carry an even greater significance than that and it's something that I need to remember towards retirement in due course that I need to spend time in the sunshine.
5. As with the 30 marathons, it's very clear that the mind plays a more significant role than the physical position, and as Ed said to me last time, the body can do much more than you think it can.
6. Just because you have time on your hands and ability to think, it definitely doesn't mean that you will. And of course I reflect much more on the simple pleasures like what we were eating at the dhaba, where I would sleep, having warm water, friendship, and if you want to think more broadly you need to do that more consciously.
7. On a rather more personal note, I hope I've learnt that love does not need to be conditional and that "I am enough".
8. I have again witnessed first hand extraordinary Indian hospitality and the dhaba owner that gave up his bed for me was only one of many, many examples.
9. The constant presence of temples and mosques were a reminder of what an important role faith plays within India, along with many other faiths such as Christianity, Sikhism, etc. I certainly spent time on this trip praying and also trying to listen to the advice of others.
10. I hope in the end I've taken the right decision to bring the ride to an end four days early and I need to remember that sometimes graciously accepting the plans that I've made need to change, that I'm not in control. I've certainly had a sense on this journey of an all-loving creator. Or be it that we, for the moment at least live in a broken world.
11. As ever I'm struck by how extraordinary India is, whether it's in its languages, in its food, in its religion, in its geography, truly incredible India.
12. I'm also struck as anybody would, in traveling through the body of India of the enormous poverty that also exists in this country and how much all of us, in our own small way, can make a difference.
13. Humour continues to play an important role in my life and I'm always grateful to those around me who manage to put up with and sometimes enjoy it.
14. I also would never underestimate the importance of support, encouragement and love from the people reading the blog and in particular the comments that have been posted on the blog and privately to me.
15. The other great thing of course is that my list of great songs on my Spotify playlist has swelled from 44 to well over 200. I have been able to explore some of the darker recesses of the Spotify web. What's also lovely is the fact that I'm now able to listen to a song and link it to the person that kindly recommended it.

# Final Thoughts

I have to say it's hard to think that I've spent six weeks, all but one day, on my bike, 100km a day, with no break.

I'm pleased.

*A massive thank you for joining me along this journey along the length of India.*

*Sending you lots and lots of love.*

*Chris xxx*

# THE LOOMBA FOUNDATION

## Profile

The Loomba Foundation was founded by Lord Raj Loomba CBE and his wife Veena, Lady Loomba. It was established in the UK by a charitable Trust Deed on 26 June 1997 and has sister charities registered in India and the USA. The inspiration came from Raj's late mother, Shrimati Pushpa Wati Loomba, who became a widow at the early age of 37 and succeeded in educating her seven children single-handedly.

The Loomba Foundation was the first global charity that is committed to empowering widows and to educate their children in India and around the world. The core work of the charity is in India; however, it has empowered widows in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Syria, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Rwanda, Malawi, Guatemala and Chile. The Loomba Foundation is proud to have worked in partnerships with the Youth Business International, HRH Prince Charles' charity, Virgin Unite, Sir Richard Branson's charity, OXFAM (GB) and UN Women

In addition to empowering widows and educating children of poor widows, the Loomba Foundation is actively engaged in advocacy to improve the lives of widows around the world.

In 2005 the Loomba Foundation launched International Widows Day at the House of Lords in the UK as an

effective day of action for widows and their children around the world. After a tireless campaign for five years the UN adopted 23rd of June as the UN International Widows Day at its 65th UN General Assembly in 2010.

The 23rd of June is a significant day as it was on this day Lord Loomba's mother, Shrimati Pushpa Wati Loomba, became a widow in Punjab in India in 1954. Every year on this date, International Widows Day is observed by the UN and many countries to raise awareness of the plight of widows around the world.

In India, the Loomba Foundation to date has educated over 10,000 children of poor widows in all 30 states and it has empowered over 12,000 impoverished widows in India, through various skills' training programmes. These skill programmes are designed to help widows to earn money, become self-reliant, educate their children and to break the cycle of poverty.



For more information visit [www.theloombafoundation.org](http://www.theloombafoundation.org)

# CYCLING FOR WIDOWS

## Sponsors and Donors

The Loomba Foundation has much pleasure to acknowledge and offer our sincere thanks to all those who have supported Chris Parsons' 'Cycling for Widows' initiative, to raise money for the Loomba Foundation, who will use all proceeds to provide skills training to the impoverished widows and their youths in India. Overall, there are hundreds of people who have given the Loomba Foundations donations and donations-in-kind as well as through Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) and JustGiving to empower widows and their youths.

**We thank everyone for their small or large donations, and would like to express our gratitude to the following major sponsors and donors.**

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### Contact

For more information, please contact Mr. Safdar Shah: [safdar.shah@theloombafoundation.org](mailto:safdar.shah@theloombafoundation.org) or visit [www.theloombafoundation.org](http://www.theloombafoundation.org)



**THE LOOMBA FOUNDATION**  
*Caring for widows around the world*





## **THE LOOMBA FOUNDATION**

*Caring for widows around the world*

### **INDIA**

SUITE NO. 13-14, IIInd Floor, 31, Prithviraj Raod DELHI 110011  
Tel:+91- 11 4185 1435 Email: mail@theloombafoundation.org  
India Registered Charity No. 752

### **UK**

Loomba House, 622 Western Avenue, London W3 0TF  
Tel: 020 81020351 Fax:020 8993 2736 Email: safdar@theloombafoundation.org  
Charity Number (England) 1064988

### **USA**

The Loomba Foundation, C/O Gutenberg Communications,  
555 Eighth Avenue, Suite 1002, New York, NY 10018  
Tel +1 212 239 8740, info@theloombafoundation.org  
USA Registered Charity No. F060927000617

[www.theloombafoundation.org](http://www.theloombafoundation.org)