

Season 10 – Part 2. Out of China



Tu 26.7.2016, day 380. Trailer-Gate (Maoming – Guangzhou, bus)

We were planning to continue our trip towards Macau. We were intending to bike another 80 km bringing us to within about 200 km of Macau. I picked up the trailer that has been following me for the last 16'000 km just like I have done every day. And then the yoke of the trailer broke right there in my hands. It probably already had a crack that had been slowly growing over the last days or maybe even weeks. Actually it was very fortunate it didn't break on some remote rural back lane! That was it. There was no easy fix for this and no way we could bike anywhere. We had a short discussion about what we could do. I was thinking of staying in Maoming and looking for a workshop, Siria had the idea of taking a bus to the next large city on the way towards Macau, where we would have more options. We were right next to the bus station. It was a very good idea. 5 minutes later we were asking about busses, 10 minutes later we were loading our bikes and the broken trailer into a bus direction Guangzhou, the third largest city in China that is about 100 km north of Macau and Hong Kong. I really like the way our crisis management worked! We arrived in Guangzhou in the early evening with the realization that taking busses with bikes is absolutely no problem whatsoever here in China.

I biked off from the bus terminal to look for a hotel and after hunting round a bit found a decent place for 20\$ quite close to the bus station, while Siria stayed with the broken trailer. There were a couple of metal workshops right next to the hotel, we went to see if they could help, but they were definitively not the right sort of people to ask. We had something to eat and then went for a rather long walk direction city centre. We ended up in what seemed to be the African neighbourhood. It was absolutely fascinating to see African immigrants in a Chinese city. I never really thought that also China would have a significant group of immigrants and it was fascinating to see how China adapts. They simply see it as business opportunity. All the Chinese restaurants had African food on the menus and large "Halal" signs up. The cheap clothing stores that can be found all over the place stocked typical African styles and colours and freshly baked pita breads were being sold all over the place. Back in the hotel we dived into the internet to try and find a solution for our trailer issue. It struck me how difficult China's blocking of

Google makes such a task for me. The Chinese search engines like bing, mostly return Chinese sites, map searches are all but useless. It also shows me how heavily I rely on Google.

The whole exercise didn't make me very optimistic that we would quickly find a solution for Trailer-Gate.





We 27.7.2016, day 381. One problem, two solutions (Guangzhou, 0 km)

We finally got to bed late the night before, as we were trying to plough our way through the censored Chinese internet, trying to find a solution for our trailer problem. This meant we also got up quite late. We headed downtown, maybe to find bike shops, maybe to find good internet. We (or at least I) was quickly feeling very frustrated. I made two phone calls to some Topeak dealers trying to find out if they can order the broken piece. I took it for granted that no-one would have the piece on stock. Over and over again I repeated the part number: TRK-TTRSP05. No SP05. SP05, P like Peter, no PETER, not TEACHER! P like Poland! I really wasn't hopeful. I was frustrated and felt I was wasting time and energy on a path that had little chance of success. I felt the right thing to do would be to try and fix the broken yoke, but I also felt that Siria expected me to focus on buying a new part. We also had no idea how we were to get to Hong Kong, it would be a pain in the neck taking the bus, as we learned that everyone has to get off the bus and take all baggage through x-ray scans. And we had two bikes, 150 kg luggage in total and a broken trailer. Even the thought of what we would have to do made me shudder!

Late in the afternoon we decided to go back direction hotel and then split up. Siria to go and check about busses to Hong Kong or Macau and I went out to see if I somehow could find a workshop to fix the yoke of the trailer. I headed out into the blue. In some back lane I came upon a guy who was welding some balustrade or similar. I dug the yoke out of my backpack and showed him the problem. He immediately realized it was Aluminium that cannot be easily welded and said "No, no, no!". But I was prepared. I pulled out the piece of bamboo I had scavenged the night before, stuck it into the broken tube of the yoke and showed him how I thought the yoke could be fixed without welding. He immediately understood and went hunting around for a steel tube with the right diameter. My heart sank as tube after tube was the wrong size. Then he pulled out a chisel with a hollow handle. The handle fitted perfectly! I said chop it off and pointed to the circular saw, but he obviously didn't want to chop his chisel in half. I pulled out my wallet and we soon agreed on 50 Yuan (about 8 \$). The chisel was chopped in half, a groove cut into the tube and the tube bent to the correct angle, then the groove was welded closed again, a bit of the broken tube on the yoke was chopped off and the chisel handle slid neatly into the tubes of the yoke. Everything looked perfect. Then he drilled a couple of holes through the Aluminium and into the handle of the chisel and pop-riveted everything together. It ended up a fine job! I was really chuffed, went into 7-eleven to buy some celebratory beers and nuts and headed back to the hotel. Then I got a sms from Siria, apparently a bike shop in Hong Kong had a spare yoke on stock! Fantastic! The back-lane weld job would certainly last as far as Hong Kong, probably even over the Pamir mountains and into Switzerland!

And so we ended the day on a much higher note than we had started with beers and nuts in the hotel, then headed out for a soup and bought some chocolate to munch back in the hotel.

So now our plan is to bike southwards towards Macau, 135 km from here. This means that tomorrow we will have to bike all the way through Guangzhou, the third biggest city in China, pulling the patched up trailer! But one thing I have learnt about bike touring: you never know what a day will bring!





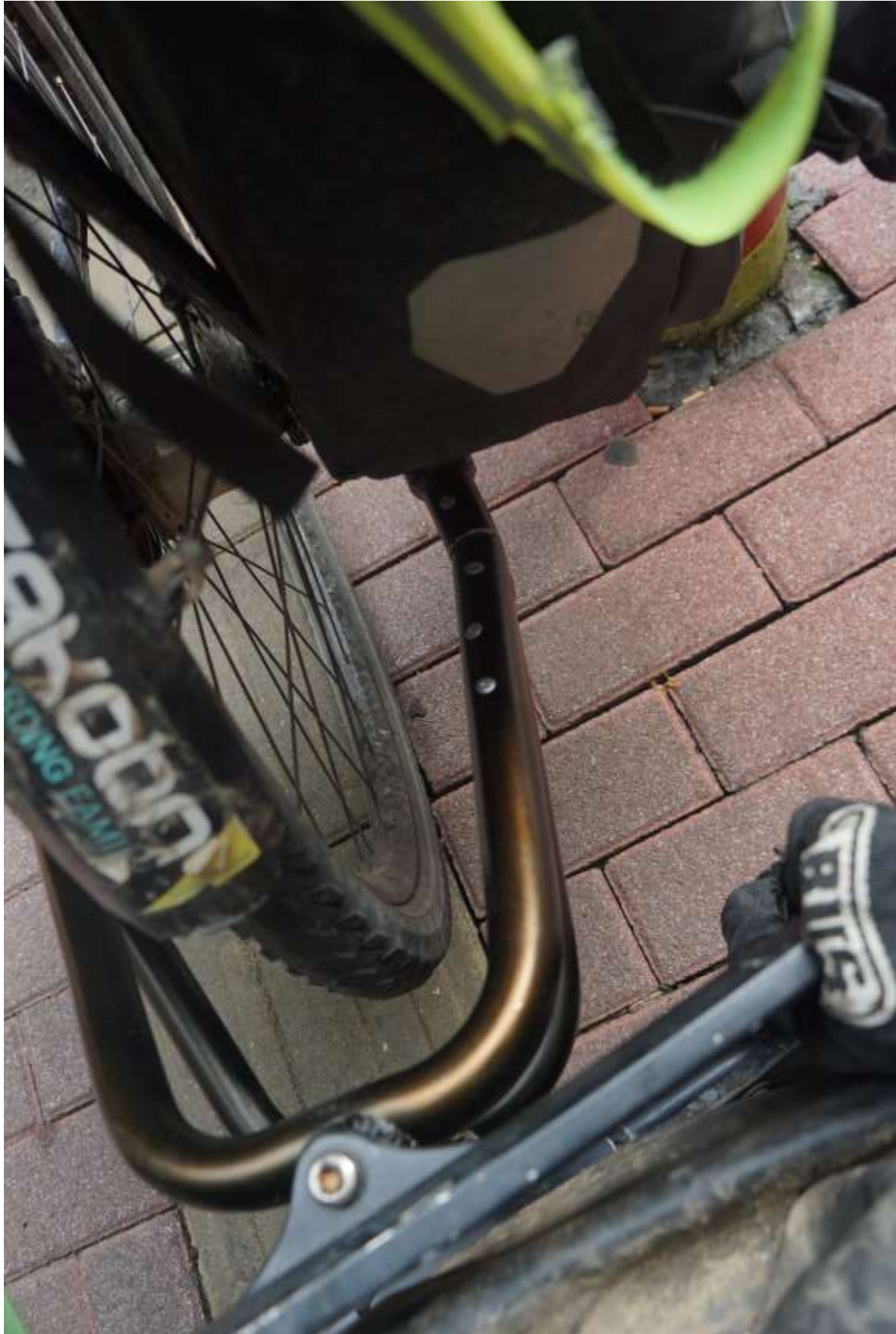


Th 28.7.2016, day 382. Through the Pearl River Megalopolis (Guangzhou – Fushu. 85 km)

In spite of Siria's best efforts, we didn't manage to get a really early start, but at least it was well before 9 am. We were staying in the north side of the city meaning that we had to bike all the way across town. It ended up being not so bad at all, in fact it was almost fun! We followed the route suggested by MapsMe and it took us through all sorts of small back lanes, through markets and gradually out of the city. South of Guangzhou towards the ocean the Pearl River is a braided river and is split up into lots and lots of side rivers. There are only huge motorway bridges over these rivers, this meant we had to get off the small roads we were biking on, get onto the slip roads and onto the motorway, then pedal up over the bridge and get off the highway on the other side and back onto the small roads. Very often these small roads were quite bad and not paved but even on these roads there were quite a lot of trucks kicking up clouds of dust. But all in all it really wasn't such a bad ride and it was fascinating biking through probably one of the largest factory production area in the world.

We found a hotel, that was really quite nice and also quite cheap, in a brand new high rise apartment block complex. A quick calculation indicated that there were about 10'000 people living there and towards the back of the complex even more sky scrapers were still being constructed. The complex was on the outskirts of a town that seemed to be built around a huge factory making household appliances. Probably most of the people living here worked in that factory. After the sun had set the large square started buzzing with life. There were lots of people playing badminton, several large groups of people doing aerobics to loud music, people were taking turns playing ping pong. There was also a rather stylish cultural centre in the middle of the square offering dancing classes, child care, a cinema, and lots of other stuff. The park was lined with cafés and restaurants. Everything was clean and tidy, there was no

sign of vandalism or graffiti. So I guess this is the life of a factory worker in China. It does not really correspond to how it is portrayed in western media, but maybe this particular example is not representative?

















Fr 29.7.2016, day 383. Long ride through factory country (Fushu – Zhuhai. 103 km)

The ride was similar to the day before, except that we advanced better as navigating was simpler. It was pretty incredible that all the 200 km between Guangzhou and the coast was pretty much built up with one factory or town or housing complex after the next. We decided to take a slightly longer route and ride into Zhuhai along the coast. The detour was certainly worth it the coastline was great and in Zhuhai there is a fantastic opera out on an island that is shaped like a clam shell. We also caught a glimpse of the new bridge linking Macau and Hong Kong. When completed it will be the longest bridge in the world with a length of about 50 km. We had arranged to stay at a Warmshower place for the night. Once again it turned out to be a great experience. We were hosted by Justin and Cara, a young American couple. Justin had volunteered to be placed in China to work on commissioning a new factory. Somehow it reminded me of my old life. They lived in a huge flat on the 14th floor of a sky scraper with a stunning view out over the city. They cooked some great Chinese food for us and we spent the evening chatting, mostly about bike touring.















