



BUILDING ON SWEAT EQUITY

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TWO NEW ZEALAND FREESKIERS COME OUT OF THEIR COMFORT ZONE, BRAVE THE ELEMENTS AND THE LOCAL CUISINE TO RAISE MONEY TO BUILD A ROOF AND SUPPLY A PRESCHOOL IN SRI LANKA.

THEIR CHALLENGE? DELIVERING THE CHEQUE, A CHEQUE WHERE ALL PROFITS GO INTO THE SCHOOL, NOT THEIR ADVENTURE.

We had to keep pedalling. It was one o'clock in the afternoon on our 25th and final day in Sri Lanka. The blistering sun was burning down on our aching, exhausted, and fatigued bodies. It was not the sun, but the raw heat of the air and humidity that hurt us. It was as if we were locked in a sauna on an exercise bike with a bright, hot light in our eyes and made to pedal at gunpoint. We had to keep pedalling. We had to make our airline flight out of Sri Lanka. The only way out of this furnace was to pedal until we made it to Negombo. There was no other option, we had run out of time and we had no money to stop and check into a room, let alone buy another flight if we missed this one.

The objective of the trip was complete, the funds were delivered, the school building was finished, class had restarted, the students were learning and the families were happy. We had met the most incredible people, heard powerful stories of hardship and heartbreak, witnessed incredible acts of generosity and experienced a mixed religion festival with Christians, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist all worshipping together. We had seen wild elephants, monkey's, deadly snakes, giant lizards, cycled over 1250km through beautiful landscape and made many new friends. It was done, it was time to go. But why was it taking so long? Why was it now so hard?

Just keep pedalling. I checked the speedometer on my handlebars, 56km down, only 1 more km than when I last checked and we still had 58km to go, not even half way. Our navigation was derived from various smartphone apps, and we expected flat sealed roads but instead we found continuous bumpy, dusty roads over undulating terrain. If the road wasn't completely dug up for road works then it really needed to be. Every downhill haunted us as we knew it ensured a steep grind back up. Pedal, just keep pedalling. Just then we realised we had missed our turn off and pedalled 3km in the wrong direction. The distance we had left was actually growing.

We felt malnourished and the food we could afford to eat was not sustaining the amount of energy our bodies were burning, it did not matter how much local street food we ate, we had both lost five kilograms and our faces looked noticeably more gaunt. Just keep pedalling. We needed to eat, and stopped at the next tiny village for the only food available at that time of day; another hot, spicy curry! Sweat dripping from our brow into the very food we were eating. This had become normal.



“ ANOTHER HOT, SPICY CURRY! SWEAT DRIPPING FROM OUR BROW INTO THE VERY FOOD WE WERE EATING. THIS HAD BECOME NORMAL. ”



Chronic sweating was now expected. There was only one minute of each day that we were not wet and salty, this was the one minute after a cold shower while the “cold” (irritatingly warm) water evaporated from our bare skin. If we could relax enough for that one minute we could enjoy a clean, dry moment before the pores began to pour sweat once again, this would continue throughout the hot humid nights making each attempt at sleeping dehydrated and restless.

Every drop of water needed to replace all this sweat had to be sterilised with our steri-pen and lugged on the bikes. Most days we would run out of clean water and have to endure the effects of moderate dehydration, this seemed to worsen with each day. We had biked an average of 64km each day for the last eight days in a row without rest and gained over 5100m in elevation. More than our skiers legs are used to! We had not prepared for this and were not fit enough. Every part of our bodies was telling us to stop.

“ **WE ARE NOT BIKE TOURERS.
WE ARE NOT ROAD BIKERS.
WE ARE SKI BUMS WHO
ALSO HAPPEN TO LOVE
RIDING BIKES.** ”

We needed to keep pedalling. Immediately after devouring the sweaty curry with burning mouths and disgruntled stomachs we got back on our rigid bike seats, which had worn our bony butts raw. Even talking to each other became too exhausting, we did not even notice the beautiful landscape we were in. Images of the airport, the air conditioned plane, ice, snow skiing and Mum’s cooking were all drifting into our heads as we started the next horrific hill. Only half way! How could we do what we have just done, again?

With the help of our families, friends, friends of friends, complete strangers and businesses of Queenstown we have so far raised \$5644.16 NZD, enough money to build the new roof on the school, provide complete teaching supplies for 1 school year, provide a lockable cabinet to keep it in, build a playground and even provide a toothbrush and toothpaste for all 56 students of the Karaveddy Preschool.

Sophie & Pete would like to thank on behalf the Karaveddy Preschool all who have donated. Thanks also to R&R Sport for the bikes and Icebreaker for the clothing used whilst in Sri Lanka. There are still many schools in Sri Lanka like Karaveddy that desperately need help, they are still collecting and you can donate at

www.justgiving.com/bikessrilanka





We are not bike tourers. We are not road bikers. We are ski bums who also happen to love riding bikes. Mountain bikes... down hill. Sri Lanka was to be a short tropical stop over from our home in Queenstown on the way to a winter ski season in Austria, but it quickly escalated into a major charity fundraising, bike-touring expedition over twenty six days.

The goal had evolved into raising enough money to build a roof on the Karaveddy pre-school in the eastern province, which was just about ruined by civil war and the tsunami. It was important to us that ALL the funds raised had to go to the school, so we rode to the school to see first-hand where the money was going. The experience was incomparable to anything we had ever done or could have imagined.

All that we had to endure on our bike riding through Sri Lanka is just a day in the life of the Sri Lankan people. They are totally resilient to all the relatively minor pain and discomfort we felt, the hardships and heartbreak they have endured are beyond our imagination, they have very few belongings yet they are so genuinely generous. They are the happiest people we have encountered. They seem to know what really matters and their attitude to life is what we now aspire to.

So we kept pedalling. We pedalled till we got to Negombo. How could we give up after such inspirational experiences? The whole expedition was so physically, mentally and sometimes very emotionally demanding. We had been challenged in most ways that one can be challenged and we had succeeded. We made it to the plane and left with a different perspective of what is necessary in life. This was the single most rewarding experience either of us had done in our lives thus far.

THE FACTS

- Total raised: \$5644.16 NZD (every cent donated)
- Time Taken: 25 days (20 riding days, 5 rest days)
- Total kms: 1274km
- Average km/day: 64km (average of the 20 riding days)
- Longest distance day: 113km
- Elevation gain: 8,170m (Like riding from the elevation of Queenstown to the top of Everest).
- Highest elevation: 2,025m
- Mechanical Failures: NONE! Not even a puncture. Thanks R& R Sport and Icebreaker
- One preschool rebuilt, stocked with supplies for 1 year, a new playground & toothbrush and toothpaste for every student.