



ICE RUN

In the lead up to my grand Siberian adventure, I found it wasn't the cold weather training, or the sourcing of supplies whilst living on a tropical Island that was difficult. But rather attempting to explain to people what I was doing without writing myself a ticket to the looney bin. After all, I was living the dream, being paid to sip cocktails in a hammock in one of the most pristine and beautiful beaches in the world. But it wasn't enough, an adventure of epic and ball freezing proportions was in order. For I would be teaming up once more with Avi, my partner in adventure to motorcycle 2000km over a frozen river into the Arctic Circle in the middle of Winter in just a few months. We had no support, no GPS, no maps, no working communications – just an appetite for adventure and exploration in one of the coldest, deadliest and remotest regions on the planet.

But that wasn't just enough; we decided to make it more 'authentic' so we sourced out an original Ural sidecar motorcycle to travel in. This motorcycle which we later named Riskiana, was a Russian copy of the WWII era BMW R71 motorcycle which turned out to be as reliable as a politicians promise.

Now the plan was this; to start in Irbit (where they originally made these vehicles) in the middle of Siberia and travel north into the Arctic Circle by any means and route to explore, see what was there and how far we could go. It was impossible to determine what may lay ahead for us on our adventure, would there be towns? Tepees? Polar Bear hunters wearing seal fur? An endless wasteland of ice desert? Arctic Wolves? We didn't know and no one could tell us because no one had explored where we were going. It was the very definition of a Badenture – a bad ass adventure!

In preparation for this adventure I attempted to contact anyone who had ever been to the regions that we were looking to explore. I eventually found a local Russkie living in the area and this was the response I got

Greetings!

You are crazy guys really. We don't understand Siberia. Siberia is a territory of very dangerous climate. Travel on a motorcycle from Irbit to Salekhard this winter is the suicidal form. The death form is slow and painful. Every winter people in broken cars in the North freeze. Cellular communication works only in cities and settlements. It is a lot of zones in hundreds of kilometres not with telecommunication. The temperature will be a minus 30-40. Motors break at such temperatures usually. People try not to leave the house on a cold. I recommend to you to go on highway. You will freeze but be not lost.

In the lead up for my departure for Russia I implemented my own cold weather training scheme. Everything from 5 months of cold water showers to seeing how many ice creams I could eat in 40 minutes whilst in an industrial freezer at -20C. Anything that could help my body and mind to acclimate to the torture that was ahead. Though my methods sound oblique, arriving in Moscow at negative 20C, Avi and I were perfectly comfortable and content with only mid layers whilst our gorgeous Russian hosts; Elena and Alina were shivering away with three layers of fur!

As a side note I'd like to outline a brief experience that Avi and I had which helps describe how cold -20C is. We decided to grab some local cuisine (McDonalds) one night in Moscow and within 100m of exiting the shop our Cokes were frozen solid and burgers inedible. At -30 with a little wind-chill, our urine would already have frozen before it the ground. Our peak exposure temperature on this expedition was negative 70C.

Dragging ourselves away from our gorgeous hosts, Avi and I left for Irbit to start our adventure and become acquainted with our sexy beast – Riskiana. From the very first

moment we saw her it all suddenly became very real. We were doing this, we were exploring the North of Siberia in a completely impractical vehicle, at the worst time of year and it was going to be amazing! Within minutes of becoming acquainted with Riskiana, we were speeding out through the old military bunkers and onto an ice race track to learn how she handled. For nearly an hour we raced on the ice, drifting corners, getting stuck in snow banks and avoiding kids being towed behind 4wd's on inner tubes – it was a surreal experience.

It was also at this juncture where we were indoctrinated into the world of Soviet reliability. For the record distance that we would cover on this trip without a major mechanical malfunction was just over 200km and the average being 50km between breakdowns – remember it was a 2000km journey!

The next morning was our launch day, skies were clear, sun was shining, both cylinders in the engine were warmed (and running for a change) and we were ready to take on some miles. Leaving the small town of Irbit behind we charged North with smiles on our dials and a bountiful stash of Vodka. Not even 20km out of town and our first breakdown occurred. Same as the day prior, we were back to running only on one cylinder. Now being a mechanic, it's normally not a problem to quickly adjust the timing and plug in a new ignition coil. However try doing so when you only get 2 minutes exposure time



with your hands before you have to spend another 20 minutes warming them up! Maintenance takes time and when you have to adjust the timing every 20-50km, your day quickly dissipates.

With as little as 6 hours of sunlight a day, we found ourselves 70km into our journey, out of light, out of warmth and without a running motorcycle. Setting up and preparing a camp site on a frozen river at night in negative 30 is no easy task, add to that an exhausting day of pushing a motorcycle through snow and you've got two very weary and tired adventurers.

We'd been told it would be best for us to sleep just in our base layers in our sleeping bags at night. Turns out that is half correct. What we failed to take into consideration was the interior temperature that our tent would drop to during the night. Partly because we were brain dead after the previous days' exertions and also because we had no idea. Come morning there were ice stalactites nearly 15cm long that had formed from the ceiling of our tent, all clothes were frozen stiff and helmet goggles were frozen over. It took a further two hours just to rewarm each article of clothing in our sleeping bags to defrost them and be able to dress ourselves – that's 32 pieces of clothing each! As the days wore on, we slowly

made our way north towards the Ob River. This would be the point where we would start running over the frozen river that would take us all the way into the Arctic Circle. Breakdown after breakdown and one misadventure after the next, we slowly made our way through the Taiga Forests and into the Arctic Tundra. We would make camp wherever we broke down that night, sometimes on frozen rivers, in primitive shelters, with Mafia gangs or in the Headquarters of oil magnates. Every day was such an adventure and sparsely different one day to the next.

One day rolled we helplessly rolled into a little town called Vershnig Singchisha to try and find a warm shelter to fix the bike. Little did we know that this would soon become a life changing moment. We found a small mechanic shop and parts dealer run by three beautiful Russian ladies. Naturally we started chatting to them in our very broken Russian which devolved into an animated Charades which then defaulted to Google translate. The girls refused to let us fix the bike and instead wanted to entertain and chat while they woke their brother up from his Vodka coma to fix it for us. Over the course of nearly 10 hours, they cooked and fed us the most amazing meals and kept on chatting to us through Google Translate.

When it came time for us to leave a substantial blizzard had blown in and they refused to let us ride in that weather. Instead one of the girls called in her father from the Army and using an Army truck proceeded to drive us all through the night in a blizzard to help us make up for lost time. So let me ask you this, would you pick up a foreign stranger on the side of the road, feed and entertain them for an entire day, fix their vehicle and then give them a lift all through the night just out of good charity – especially if they didn't speak your language?

This wasn't just an isolated incident. Passing through the town of Yugorsk we were broken down once again and were quickly befriended by a company called Gazprom – one of the largest oil and gas companies in the world. We had CEO's and managers personally spending time with us through all hours of the night fixing our bike because they were so interested in what we were doing. We received full red carpet treatment, riding in open top limos to see ICBM missiles and Fighter Jets. It certainly was not what we expected.

Heading further North however and finally reaching the Ob River the landscape became considerably less civilised. We could go for 100's of km's without seeing anyone else – all the while still breaking down every



50-70km's. In this region we were primarily travelling on Zimnicks. A Zimnick is part of a labyrinth of unmarked ice passageways that change every year and are a cartographer and navigators nightmare. We once travelled for nearly two days before getting stopped by some yokels in a tank and told we were going the wrong way.

Though the Zimnicks were without a doubt the most adventurous and entertaining part of the journey. Not only could you barrel round trees and frozen rivers completely sideways, but you could do so at incredible speeds – when the motor was running... These nights we'd camp on the frozen rivers and it quickly became apparent that the further North that we went into the Tundra – the harder it would be to maintain fires with limited and very frozen wood.

Our process would essentially be to take 2.5hr fire piquet shifts at night. It would take 30 minutes to gather enough wood for 45 minutes

burn time. Those extra 15 minutes would then be used to warm up your frozen toes before it was time to get more wood. On one particularly cold and horrible occasion I sat shivering by the fire, and I noticed a pure white Arctic Wolf start stalking behind me. Too cold to move and too tired to care I stayed where I was at the fire – it was below -30 at this stage. To my surprise this wolf didn't attack, it continued stalking behind me until it eventually came up to my side and sat. Still trying not to move and scare the creature, it then proceeded to lie down and lean on me! We stayed like this for a few minutes before the fire started to dwindle again. At which point the wolf stood and continued on wondering through the tundra. It's such beautiful and unexpected experiences like this that I will never forget. To this day it is still the most stunning and magnificent creature I've ever seen.

Travelling through such extreme regions was certainly not without its hardships.

With ambient temperatures of 35 below and wind-chill of another 35, it took its toll on our bodies and minds. Mental processing power was severely restricted, simple menial tasks would take eternities to complete. Regular bivvy safety stops would be undertaken so Avi and I could help warm each other's feet and hands back to life.

We discovered there were essentially three levels of cold. There is the feeling of cold that you get from your nerve endings which you would get within the first few moments of stepping out into the Siberian winter. Then comes the cold where you've lost all feeling in your extremities but still have movement and this lasts about 10 minutes. The final stage is where you have no sense of feeling in your extremities and it feels as if there are lumps of ice separating your toes. It would give the feeling of inhibiting all movement which is the status we would endure for up to 20 hours a day. The worst and most horrible part of the entire journey wasn't actually being cold – it was getting rewarmed at day's end. It was an excruciatingly painful process that neither of us ever wanted to go through – let alone daily. Our brains would cry out every night and beg us not to warm our feet back to life – to have to endure the pain again. But it was necessary, necessary to help prevent the frostbite that we would undoubtedly suffer from otherwise. Life was not without humour, even in the frozen wasteland. Day after day we rode over the Zimnicks, often going for days without seeing anyone. We would stop to have a Commonwealth Soccer match with broken engine parts, break dancing, moonwalk – do anything to keep our spirits up and blood flowing. And after days without



seeing another human, one would assume that it would be pretty safe to take a dump in an open ice field without being noticed. Well after travelling all day without seeing a single soul on the ice Avi decided one day to do exactly that. Words cannot even come close to describing the expressions on the drunk driving Russians when they passed a black Indian man taking a dump on the side of the Zimnicks in the middle of Siberia – priceless is all I have to say!

After 2000km, exposure temperatures of negative 70C, 42 spark plugs, 6 ignition coils, 3 ignition harnesses, 2 timing units, a carburettor and a whole bunch of MacGyvering; Avi and I made it to Salekhard in the Arctic Circle. We had passed through the largest forest in the world to the deserts of the Siberian Arctic, swam under the frozen rivers, drifted over them in a WWII era motorcycle, narrowly escaping fights amongst drunk

locals, experienced some of the most beautiful and amazing people and cultures and raised over 940GBP for the British Heart Foundation. Siberia was an amazing BADENTURE that was exciting to plan, undertake and achieve. It has only inspired more out there adventures that I can only begin to imagine to realise!

