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10 Years on 2 Wheels: 77 Countries, 250,000 Miles

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It may well be a cliché to talk about learning through the University of Life, but this is just how Helge Pedersen has matured and developed his personal philosophy over the 10 years it has taken him to ride his motorcycle 250,000 miles through 77 countries. Pedersen hails from Kristiansand, Norway. In 1981, Pedersen bought a BMW R80 G/S motorcycle. In order to prepare it for a lengthy journey, he added a 40-liter fuel tank and other bits and pieces. Finally, as Helge had imagined so many years earlier, he was on his way to a foreign land Africa, where he traveled alone for two years. Crossing the world s largest desert via motorcycle was Helge s first big challenge on his African odyssey. As a departing gift, some friends had given him their version of a map of the Sahara a sheet of sandpaper marked with the letter ?N? for North. That ?map? proved to be as good as any other. After reaching the southern tip of Africa, Helge turned north towards Malawi. A dream came true when a fellow countryman hired him to help with his safari business, centered in Kasungu National Park. Five months later Helge was on the road again. After climbing to the top of Kilimanjaro, Africa s highest mountain, he journeyed on to Southern Sudan where civil war forced him to change plans and ride through Somalia. Together with another tourist, the Somali military placed the two bikers under house arrest until it was confirmed neither were Soviet or Cuban soldiers crossing from Ethiopia with the intention of sabotaging military installations. North Yemen offered another imprisonment, which challenged Pedersen s endurance. With no common language between them, Helge waited while soldiers confirmed his identity. He spent an excruciating day, worrying about loosing a hand to a swift ax in a country that practiced such radical punishment. Helge returned home only to find the travel bug had truly set its fangs he could not settle down. Plans for the next stage of his travels began to take shape. This time, the goal was to go around the world. With sponsorships and magazine contracts firmly in place, Pedersen boarded a cargo ship to Argentina, working in exchange for his passage. Once he arrived, he traveled to a national park set among the peaked mountains of Ushuaia, the southernmost town in South America. It was there he learned to speak Spanish to help him along the way during his South American travels. Helge had calculated the Latin American trip would take approximately one year, but it took him nearly three years to reach North America. Helge is the first motorcyclist ever to ride overland from South America to North America via the infamous Darien Gap 80 road less miles of virtually impenetrable, bug-infested jungle and swamps, nothing but Indian trails emerging in Panama City three weeks later with infected legs and broken bones. Crossing the Darien proved to be his most difficult endeavor. After two months of traveling through the States, Helge arrived in Seattle, Washington. While presenting a slide show, he met his girlfriend, Karen Ofsthus, an American-born woman with immigrant grandparents from Norway. Pedersen crisscrossed the U.S., occasionally with Karen as a passenger. Participating in a relationship had become the new challenge in his life, and far greater than crossing deserts or impenetrable jungles. Pedersen eventually continued his travels to Asia, once again working his passage on a Norwegian freighter destined for Japan. Later, Karen joined him, and together they traveled over 9,000 miles on the four main islands of Nippon. Karen, a wildlife and environmental naturalist, was called home to work, leaving Helge to travel alone in South Korea, Australia and SE Asia. After a 10-month separation, they reunited in Turkey and, together, completed the return trip to Norway. It was ten years after Pedersen had first departed

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