

## One Out, One In

I was watching the GPS count down the kilometers.

We were riding down a dirt road on the outskirts of Beijing. It was a rough track, full of potholes, but lined with twin columns of trees, like most of the roads in China.

The GPS said we were only about five kilometers away from the spot where we'd picked up the bikes when we set out on our tour of China. It seemed impossible that this crude road could be that close to the bustling commercial strip that we'd putted away from a couple of weeks before, but I trusted the numbers the Garmin GPS V was showing me. It had been our trustworthy guide for our year of exploration of the world, from Africa to the Himalayas to the Middle East and now across China.

4.8, 4.6, 4.3, the numbers clicked down. It was hard to believe this year of exploration, adventure and discovery was ending. We'd ridden various motorcycles over 18,300 miles (29,451 kilometers) across the globe while exploring the world's major non-European societies, and these were the last few miles.

The day before, I had sat atop the Great Wall of China and contemplated our travels. My mind had wandered through the memories of the government officials, teachers, business people, bankers, soldiers, students, farmers, United Nations program managers, tribesmen, monks, nomads, journalists and others I'd met, interviewed and learned from. I had savored memories of small villages, tiny mountain roads, remote sunsets and primitive accommodations. My mouth watered at recollections of local foods and exotic specialties. I fondly recalled sampling local wines, beers and distilled spirits. I rejoiced at the old friends we'd visited and the countless new ones we made along the way.

But I spent most of my time contemplating some of the lessons we'd learned from our travels.

- People are more alike than different.
- Many things are universal, especially with children and teenagers.
- There are good and bad people everywhere, but mostly good.
- Geopolitically, things are likely to get a lot worse before they get better.
- And the lesson we learned in Africa that we saw reinforced all over the world: those with the least had the most.

3.6, 3.4, 3.2, we were only a couple of miles out now. Only two miles to go after all these miles, all over the world. We came to the end of the dirt road. I recognized the intersection as where I'd turned around when I took the bike for a test ride. We crossed over to pavement. The road filled with the developing world's usual assortment of scooters, bicycles, pedestrians, smoking trucks, busses, hand carts, mini-busses, donkeys, animals and pedestrians. I cranked my senses up to maximum sensitivity. I felt like Rick Mears leading the last lap of the Indy 500, listening for the telltale sound of a car failure that would cost him the win. I intently monitored every side street for trucks, every parked vehicle for sudden U turns, and every pedestrian for a sudden cross-street dash.

We were under one kilometer now, so the GPS was counting down the meters. 972, 734, 648. I could see the bridge next to the turn now. I could see the building where we picked up the bikes. 235, 185, 147.

Airline pilots have a simple mathematical measurement for success. If the number of takeoffs equals the number of landings, all is well.

Motorcycle riders share a similar litmus test of success. If the number of bikes that depart for a trip equal the number that return, all is well. The number is usually expressed as "sixteen out, sixteen in," or "eight out, eight in" or whatever the number of bikes on the ride.

121, 82, 45, 0.

A year of exploring the world by motorcycle. No accidents, no injuries.

One out, one in.

Good numbers.