



# 400 days, 29,230 km, 2,011 pictures

CYCLIST FROM SHENZHEN TREKKED THE ENTIRE BORDER OF CHINESE MAINLAND TO PROMOTE UNIVERSIADE

By SHI YINGYING  
CHINA DAILY

SHENZHEN — If the shape of China's border resembles a rooster, 29-year-old Zhou Ziqian's bicycle trek completed a perfect outline after a 29,230-km, 400-day journey. Starting on March 31, 2010, in Shenzhen, Zhou returned to his hometown on May 4 of this year.

"If I had 800 days to spare, I would spend them all on the road," the young graphic designer said.

Before his departure, Zhou asked himself if 400 days was enough time to accomplish his dream of cycling around the mainland.

"I was wondering how I could do with it," he said.

And now he has the answer.

"It took 400 days, but I did it," said Zhou proudly. "I've been to (China's) southernmost Sanya, the western end of Kashgar, the northernmost county of Mohe and the eastern end of Fuyuan."

The tour was tough and Zhou was described as "looking like a refugee at a distance and seemed like a beggar when he came closer" by passersby, he said. He remembered his most miserable dinner in Liaoning province at Chinese New Year's Eve.

"It was very cold and when I finally found myself a little place to stay the night at a public bathhouse, I decided to try my luck and find somewhere to eat," recalled Zhou. "But not a single restaurant in that village was open because of the upcoming New Year, not even a small shop for a piece of bread.

"I made myself instant noodles and told myself, 'damn, today is New Year's Eve!'" he said. Zhou was much luckier on the day he rode to Dandong of Liaoning province, where he got invited by a motel owner to a decent "get-together meal" at Chinese New Year.

Lugging more than 40 kg of tent and other equipment was not Zhou's only challenge, the 400 days of loneliness turned out to be the bigger one.

"I met more Tibetan antelopes than human beings on the Xinjiang-Tibet Highway," said Zhou. "Often you didn't meet a single person for more than 100 km."

"But I was never afraid of getting lost. Many people think it's easy to lose one's way in those remote villages and counties. But I believe the opposite — it's much easier to get lost in a metropolis like Beijing or



Zhou Ziqian stands atop a mountain in Tibet. "I met more Tibetan antelopes than human beings," he said.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Zhou rests on the side of the road in Inner Mongolia.

Shanghai. How can you lose your way if there's only one way available?" said Zhou.

Zhou said one of the most frequent questions he was asked on his odyssey was why use a bicycle for such a long trip? Being a great fan of hiking and mountaineering, a sun-tanned Zhou said it's "not

the power of the engine, but the power of the human being."

"It was not until 2007 that I became a cyclist," he said. On a long-distance hike in 2007, Zhou and his friends spent six days reaching the peak of Mount Gongga, the highest mountain in Sichuan province.

"There was this couple, on their bicycles, which passed us swiftly towards the peak at about 4,500m while I was enjoying my bird's eye view of the snow-covered mountain," he said. "So, then I thought, there is a better way of climbing the mountain."

Zhou has kept numerous photos, 2,011 in all, of people he met during his marathon ride.

"I set out with the mission of promoting the 26th World University Games to be held in Shenzhen in August. That's why I took pictures of 2,011 smiling people holding a UU, the Universiade mascot, and invited them to the Games," said Zhou.

"It's not only about these 2,011 photos, it represents 2,011 different lifestyles that impressed me," said Zhou.

Zhou said he met a 21-year-old shepherd in Gansu province, who got married many years ago, and had a two-year-old child. "Before I even asked him 'why did you get

married so early?' he asked. 'Why don't you find yourself a wife? You're already 29! You can only see your grandson when you're over 70 years old!'"

"It's that simple, people choose their lives," Zhou said. "For a moment, I thought that guy's life was not bad at all — he spends half of the year transporting sheep from Gansu to Xinjiang to earn about 100,000 yuan (\$14,000), and the rest of the time he keeps his family company and does anything he likes."

The journey changed Zhou's life. He said he wouldn't choose a full-time job again. "I can only be a freelancer as I want to be the master of my own time.

"I was always in a good mood when I was on the road, but once I came back to the city, all kinds of stress made me feel depressed," said Zhou. "Your attitude to living and traveling are interconnected. Now I'm enjoying my life with a roving attitude."