



TIM AND EDEN IN COPENHAGEN'S AMALIENBORG SLOTSPLADS ON THE FIRST DAY OF RIDING THEIR EUROPEAN TOUR.

# Warm Showers

Meraiah Foley and Tim Wimborne pedal a yarn

You may have seen them rolling into Braidwood: weary bicycle tourists, loaded up with gear. Perhaps you've driven past them on the highway or the backroads, and wondered where on earth they are coming from, and where on earth they are going.

More often than not, they are headed to our place.

For the past four years, we have been opening our home to these intrepid cyclists via WarmShowers, a reciprocal hospitality network for bicycle tourists. They come from all over: Germany, England, Canada, Australia, France. Propelled by their own two legs, a sense of adventure, and a large dose of determination, many have travelled tens of thousands of kilometres before they arrive in Braidwood, where we provide them with a place to sleep, a hearty meal, and of course, a 'warm shower'.

WarmShowers is a volunteer-run website with 39,000 registered hosts and 89,000 cyclists in 175 countries. Hosts provide a place to sleep – a sofa, a spare room, a spot in the garden to pitch a tent – and maybe a meal, or a place for guests to cook. Guests provide good cheer and a break from the day-to-day, and when they are more settled, pay the favour forward to someone else. There is no financial

benefit, just the chance to be inspired, make new friends, and share some stories from the road.

We have hosted dozens of cyclists over the years, and been hosted several times in return. Before settling in Braidwood, we lived three years in Singapore, where we hosted more than sixty cyclists and never had a bad experience. Some of our guests were on shorter tours of a few weeks or months; others had ridden from Europe to Southeast Asia, with no plans to stop any time soon.

There was Matteo, the 21-year-old Italian who set out to drive from Milan to Singapore, but sold the car in Kazakhstan and travelled the rest of

A QUIET RURAL CYCLE PAST THE WINDMILLS OF KINDERDIJK NEAR ROTTERDAM.



MERIAH AND MORGAN ENJOY A QUIET RURAL CYCLE ROUTE THAT PASSES THE WINDMILLS OF KINDERDIJK NEAR ROTTERDAM IN THE NETHERLANDS. (BELOW) GLOBAL CYCLING COUPLE FROM CANADA, DAN CALVERLY (2-L) FROM ENGLAND AND TARA WEIR (3-L), WITH US IN BRAIDWOOD BEFORE HEADING FOR NOWRA.

the way on a \$200 Chinese bicycle, living on bags of rice, foraged fruit, and \$5 a day. There was Bruno and Ludi, the French couple following Portuguese trade routes on a mixed tandem, whose trip was cut short by the unexpected arrival of baby Aiyana.

Then there was Michael and Ciska, a middle-aged Dutch couple who set off on bikes with their two young sons in 2008, and are still out there touring the world today.



land, we were the guests of honor on a community bike ride organised by our hosts, and ate toasted raclette made from the milk of the neighbourhood cow. We also had the chance to visit some of our favourite guests. Albane and Rodolphe invited us to stay a week with them in Paris. Paul and Nina took us on a tour of Bern, and then offered up their family chalet in the Swiss Alps.

Back home in Braidwood, we are hosting once again. A few days ago, we bid farewell to James, a 19-year-old Englishman spending his gap year

discovering the world in 80-kilometre stages. We also hosted Tara and Dan, a Canadian-English couple who met while pedaling across Kyrgyzstan, and came to us by way of the Oodnadatta Track, the Stuart Highway, and Barry Way. And there was poor Oscar, the solo German cyclist who, not knowing the conditions, thought he would try and cycle up the Kings Highway from Batemans Bay on New Year's Eve. After being roundly abused, he hitched a ride in a ute. Later, we tried to lift his spirits with drinks at the Braidwood Hotel.

We have been cyclists almost all our lives, but life is such that we can't always be on the road. WarmShowers brings the road to us, and we are richer for it.

So, the next time you see some weary cycle tourists winching their pushies into Braidwood after a long day on the road, say 'G'day' and show them the way to our place. Tell them a cold beer and a warm shower awaits them. ■

For more information:  
www.warmshowers.org

NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD ENGLISHMAN JAMES DONOVAN POSES WITH HIS STEAD OUTSIDE OUR HOUSE BEFORE TAKING THE NERRIGA ROAD OUT OF BRAIDWOOD. (BELOW RIGHT) LUNCH ON THE ROAD IN THE TINY DANISH COAST HAMLET OF BALLUM.

