

Bicycles will save the world

Arianna Casiraghi, Daniel Rayneau-Kirkhope, and Zola the dog

15 August 2022

The project: what we did and why we did it

Our project is born as a reaction to the political inertia towards the climate and environmental emergency we are facing; it aims to motivate individual people to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle, specifically regarding transport choices.

The science is clear: an escalating global catastrophe is already manifesting through intense heatwaves, wildfires, and devastating sequences of droughts and floods, which threaten our life. Nevertheless governments keep postponing the drastic changes that are necessary in order to preserve this planet for us and future generations.

We need change. We need action. If politicians are playing dumb, this change and this action must come from us, the people. We all have opportunities to make an individual impact and move towards a more sustainable lifestyle. A huge step in this direction would be achieved by reconsidering our common transport choices and opting for cleaner alternatives.

To promote this change and demonstrate the wonderful potential of bicycles, we have cycled 7237 km to draw the shape of a huge bicycle across western Europe. We hope that our slightly mad endeavour might inspire others to ditch their car in favour of the bicycle for daily transport needs.

While we appreciate that cars may be useful and even essential for some people, we strongly believe that the vast majority of the population would benefit immensely from swapping the car for the bicycle. Not only this would significantly reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions linked with transport, thus slowing the rate at which climate change occurs, but it would also contribute drastically towards decreasing air pollution, which is harmful for humans and the environment alike.

Furthermore, since riding a bicycle is intrinsically fun, cheap, and comes with a whole host of health and social benefits, we think it would be incredibly beneficial for most people to cycle on an everyday basis – especially now that electric and cargo bicycles are readily available.

About us

We are an Italian–British couple, while our dog, Zola, was born in Finland. Until recently we were both working as research physicists in universities and research institutes. Arianna’s research was focused on magnetism and experimental spintronics while Daniel’s research centred on structural physics and optimisation. After completing our Ph.D. studies at the University of Nottingham (UK), where we met back in 2008, we initially moved to Finland, to take up our first research jobs. We later moved to Italy, and continued in our respective research careers for a few more years, until 2019. We currently still live in Italy, in the picturesque village of Orta san Giulio, from where we left to begin our cycling endeavour.

We sold our car in 2019 and have enjoyed a car-free life since. It is not always easy in the hilly countryside we live in, but we do not too often regret our decision! We have both loved bicycles and cycling for as long as we can remember. We have also undertaken long cycling journeys in the past, across several European countries. The longest of these trips took us from Orta san Giulio to Istanbul.

We have just finished cycling 7237 km to draw the shape of a huge bicycle across Europe. Zola has been travelling with us on a [custom cargo bike](#) that Daniel has purposely built to carry her.

We do not plan to resume our previous jobs but intend to embrace a more sustainable, simple, and less career-driven lifestyle. Daniel hopes to start a business building custom bicycles ([drkcycles.com](#)), while Arianna is undecided about her future plans but knows she wishes to promote green living in some way.

World record for the largest GPS drawing

We had initially hoped to set a new Guinness World Record for the largest GPS drawing. To do this, we collected all the relevant proof (photos at road signs and landmarks as well as receipts from shops) and of course always had the GPS recording. Unfortunately, the rules for the official world record require you to complete the drawing in one continuous journey. This was not possible due to a knee injury we suffered with and the pandemic. While we were a bit upset not to set a new record, we have nonetheless set an unofficial word record, beating the previous record of 7163.67 km, which was obtained by multiple means of transport. We also beat the previous unofficial world record for the biggest GPS drawing undertaken by bike, which was 4106 km. Far more importantly, we are quite happy to have drawn the biggest bicycle ever!

Existing press coverage

We are very proud that our project has already been featured in 22 news outlets, both regular press and online channels, across 6 European countries. We are particularly honoured to have appeared in:

- “La Stampa”, “Il Fatto Quotidiano”, “Greenreport.it”, and “Inbici.net” (Italy)
- “Lincolnshire Echo”, “Road.cc”, and “Cyclist.co.uk” (UK)
- “La République du centre” (France)
- “Iberobike.com” (Spain)

The success of our project depends crucially on the amount of press coverage that we are able to achieve. We would be extremely grateful for any help that you may be able to provide with publicising further our message. Thank you.

FAQs

- **Across which countries have you drawn the bicycle?**

The bicycle-shaped route took place in western Europe and spanned France, Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg, Switzerland, and Austria. The detailed route map can be found at: [bicycleswillsavetheworld.com](#).

- **How long did it take you to draw the bicycle?**

It took us 131 days. We started the drawing on the 25th of July 2019 and hoped to finish it by the end of November of the same year, but things did not quite go to plan. After two months on the road, one of us suffered from patellofemoral pain syndrome and had to take time off cycling to undertake physiotherapy. We set off again in November 2019 and managed to cycle until the end of December 2019, when we had

to stop because of the cold and our unsuitable equipment. We had planned to start cycling again in March 2020, but then of course the pandemic started, and lockdown measures were enforced. We did not resume our journey immediately, as we did not feel it was the responsible thing to do. Indeed, we only started cycling again in June 2022 after being fully vaccinated (and boosted) and after the worse of the pandemic seemed to have passed. We completed the drawing on the 9th of August 2022.

- **How did Zola travel with you?**

Zola is extremely lucky, since Daniel built a [special cargo bike](#) to carry her. During the trip, she spent most of her time in the cargo bike, which is also equipped with a roof to give her some shade in summer and protection from the elements in winter. Every day we also let her run alongside the bikes for some 5 to 10 km, mainly depending on how busy the roads were.

- **What did Zola think about the whole adventure?**

She loved it! We think she was born to travel! She particularly enjoyed watching the world pass by from her privileged position and sniffing all the new smells. And the tent became like her new home!

- **Where did you sleep and what did you eat?**

We tried to sleep in our tent as much as possible, which meant basically every day in summer and about half the time in winter. For the coldest times we also relied on [warmshowers.org](#) – an amazing community that supports cycletourists – and the occasional inexpensive hotel or Airbnb.

We cooked almost all our meals, but we did splurge in a good pizza about once a week (after all, Arianna is Italian!).

- **What have been the highlights and low points of your journey?**

The highlight of the trip has been the incredible support that we have received from people along the road. Without them, cycling through the cold and rainy winter months would simply not have been possible with our tight budget. We met some of these remarkable people through [warmshowers.org](#) – an established community that supports cycletourists – while we met others simply by bumping into them, along the road... We still are amazed about how open-minded and selfless people can be!

Regarding the low points, the fact that one of us developed a knee injury was really quite demoralising. We had to stop travelling in order to rest and undertake dedicated physiotherapy sessions, which unfortunately meant that our project got delayed.

Contact

- Email: info@bicycleswillsavetheworld.com
- Web: <https://www.bicycleswillsavetheworld.com/>
- Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/bicycleswillsavetheworld_/