



# TREADLIE



**THE BIKES OF WRATH**  
ADVENTURING IN AMERICA

**EARTH'S FASTEST HUMAN**  
ONE WOMAN'S QUEST

**MEETING POINT**  
CREATING A CYCLING CROSSROAD

**SAVE FERROUS!**  
STEEL FRAMED ROAD BIKES

**BEYOND IMAGINATION**  
A JAPANESE ARTIST'S VISION

# THE BIKES OF WRATH

INSPIRED BY THE NOVEL *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*, FIVE AUSTRALIAN FRIENDS MADE A FILM ABOUT THEIR JOURNEY CYCLING FROM OKLAHOMA TO CALIFORNIA.

There are stories that change you. Stories that challenge your ideas about yourself and the world around you. John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* did that for Charlie Turnbull. Charlie, along with filmmaker Cameron Ford and three of their friends, is now doing the same thing for others with his documentary film *The Bikes of Wrath*. Charlie first read *The Grapes of Wrath* in 2011 and was immediately entranced. For those unfamiliar with the tale, the novel follows the fictional Joad family as bank debt, governmental greed and

Oklahoma's devastating weather drive them to migrate west to California in search of work. The poverty and exploitation they both witness and experience mirrors the real-life suffering that so many Dust Bowl families and farms endured in the 1930s. Several years after reading the novel, Charlie would constantly bring it up in conversation. So it wasn't long before one of those conversations turned into an idea for an adventure, and later a documentary – to retrace the same 1600-mile (2600-kilometre



**ABOVE** 2600 kilometres, 420 dollars, 30 days, five green cyclists, three cameras and two guitars – *The Bikes of Wrath* follows five Australian friends as they trace the Joad family's journey down Route 66.



**ABOVE** A relieving stretch of flat along the 2600-kilometre ride from Oklahoma to California.



**ABOVE** Along the way, the boys were astounded by the warm welcome they received from friendly strangers who never stayed strangers for long.



**ABOVE** The documentary shows a different side to the American South than what is often portrayed in popular culture.

approx.) route that the Joad family took from Sallisaw, Oklahoma to Bakersfield, California in the book, but to do it on bikes.

And in 2015, with just \$420 – today's equivalent of the Joad family's \$18 in the 1930s – Charlie Turnbull, Cameron Ford, Leon Morton, Oliver Chiswell and Redouane Chaouki did just that, but with an additional aim to explore if and how America had progressed since *The Grapes of Wrath* was written.

"During the ride I was stunned by how relevant Steinbeck's writing was. All the things he wrote about – wealth inequality, migration, the role of the family, and the health of the American Dream – seemed to be front and centre in the conversations we had along the way," says Charlie. "Of course the country has progressed, but those issues are certainly still as relevant as they were when Steinbeck published the book." Just like in the book, it's the people encountered along the way who not only prove the beautiful

nature of the human spirit but also disrupt the group's – and perhaps much of the outside world's – perception of the American South. From generous gifts of money, food and shelter to long and insightful conversations about how migrants are treated in America today, *The Bikes of Wrath* depicts a level of compassion and understanding from total strangers that, at some points, is truly astounding.

"I really wasn't sure what to expect. I had a romantic idea of what small-town America was going to be – like diners, friendly folk and conservatism – and I think that wasn't too far from the truth," says Charlie. "But, maybe like a lot of people, I was also aware and probably subscribed to a lot of the negative stereotypes that persist about the Bible Belt and American South. These beliefs were totally challenged, and I really hope the film challenges our audience in that way, too." Before the trip began, none of the five had any experience in cycling beyond riding very short



**ABOVE** Travelling without a support vehicle, the five cyclists carried all their camera gear on the back of their bikes and charged them with solar panels.



**TOP** During the documentary the guys ask several of the people they meet along the way to read out poignant passages from the book that inspired it all, *The Grapes of Wrath*.

**MIDDLE** Cameron Ford (left) and David Bean (right) of Circle R gas station in Gore, Oklahoma chat about the Dust Bowl migration while fixing one of *The Bikes of Wrath* trailer tyres.

**BOTTOM** A friendly group prays for the guys to complete their journey safely.



**ABOVE** Sleeping behind truck stops, petrol stations and convenience stores became a common occurrence during *The Bikes of Wrath* journey.

distances along inner-city bike paths. But in some ways it was their amateur status that made their modern-day Dust Bowl pilgrimage so successful. During the film, it's obvious that the group's genuine interest in people's lives and opinions is what convinces strangers to open up to them. But it's their initial presence on the bikes, sometimes combined with an exhausted vulnerability, that gets people talking to them in the first place. It's not all positive though. As you would expect, their inexperience also created tough situations for the group. Broken bones, lack of food and far too much luggage were all significant issues, but it was the filming itself that served up one of the biggest stumbling blocks.

"Filming on the bikes was super tough," says Cameron. "We didn't have a support vehicle and carried all of our camera gear, plus we were charging the cameras with solar panels that hung off the back of the bikes – so on top of trying to ride 80 miles (128 kilometres approx.) a day, we also had to constantly access gear to make sure

we were getting enough shots of the trip."

However, four years on it's clear that the struggle was worth it. Released publicly for the first time in 2018, *The Bikes of Wrath* picked up eight awards from 10 film festivals across America and Europe last year, including the People's Choice Award at the prestigious Banff Mountain Film Festival. They also secured a theatrical release of the film in Australia and America, as well as an extended six-episode series to be broadcast in both New Zealand and America.

When asked if either of them would embark on a similar bikepacking trip again, Cameron seems the most eager: "A bike is certainly, at least in my opinion, the best way to experience a different place, culture and country – to meet people and to connect."

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