



# The Bicycle Diaries: My 21,000-Mile Ride for the Climate

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Climate researcher David Kroodsma dreamed of bicycling down his driveway in Palo Alto, California, and pedaling for months until he reached the tip of South America. When he finally planned his trip, he wanted more than just adventure; he also wanted to raise awareness about the impacts of climate change on the countries he would explore. So he set out on a well-packed bicycle with a business card, a laptop, and an eagerness to share his knowledge. His project, Ride for Climate, caught on; he gave over 100 school and assembly presentations, garnered dozens of newspaper accounts of his journey, and appeared on international television.

During nearly two years of travel, Kroodsma witnessed the world from a seat of a bicycle. He traversed unique ecosystems, coastline settlements, and glaciated mountains. "While biking," he writes, "no windshield protects you from the rain, heat, or wind, and no wall divides you from the people along the road." Countless people, from subsistence farmers to petroleum engineers, sheltered him and shared their stories. These experiences transformed and personalized his understanding of climate change, and in *The Bicycle Diaries*, Kroodsma shares these unexpected insights through a gripping travel narrative.

## The Bicycle Diaries: My 21,000-Mile Ride for the Climate Details

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# From Reader Review *The Bicycle Diaries: My 21,000-Mile Ride for the Climate* for online ebook

**Evelyn Nieves says**

## **A travelogue with purpose**

This book presents a great blending of adventure and information. It is so full of information about how climate affects local environments. I never imagined climate policy (if policy is the right word) is easy, but Mr Kroodsma's explanations make it clear solutions will not be simple. At the same time, with concentrated effort, commitment, and humanity, solution is possible. In that there is hope.

Mr Kroodsma's descriptions highlight how much we take for granted about the people with whom we share this great planet. Lives of people who live within relative proximity of one another are different often only because a national border, with the differing governments in either side, passes between them. We can make those national distinctions on land, but we necessarily share the same air as it follows its course around the planet. What we put into the air here affects people we will never see. The same is true to a lesser degree in the seas.

I have been fortunate to travel to many of the countries which Mr Kroodsma pedaled through, but by more conventional means. It was great to revisit them through his travels. I found the people in those places to be as warm and welcoming as he describes them. I encourage everyone to pick a section of his route and visit there. You'll find the world truly is a wonderful place; a place well worth preserving.

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## **Mike Robbins says**

It's late 2005 and a young Californian climate researcher, David Kroodsma, gets on his bike, as he usually does. But this time, instead of turning right to go to work, he turns left to ride to Tierra del Fuego. He has a double motive. He's going to have one hell of a ride. And he's going to spread awareness of climate change as he goes along.

I had several reasons for wanting to read this book. I love Latin America, I like bikes, and have also been a climate-change researcher. (I'd just got back from fieldwork in Brazil when Kroodsma set out.) Most of all, I love good travel writing, especially about long journeys – I read Ted Simon's *Jupiter's Travels* many years ago and was hooked.

But I found it hard to get into this book at first. It seemed to take Kroodsma a long time to get going; there was too much about his motivations. The book should have started when he crossed the border. The backstory could have been dealt with in a paragraph or two, or worked into the story later. For God's sake, Dave, get on your *bike* already. I was also irritated (unreasonably, perhaps) at the amount of hi-tech kit he acquired for the journey. "I also had a small suite of electronics: a laptop (which I would mail to a friend once I reached Mexico), a PalmPilot with tiny folding keyboard (to replace the laptop south of the border), an iPod for music and to back up photos, extra memory cards, a host of chargers and cables, and a small tripod for my camera. I also brought a small electric razor powered by rechargeable AA batteries..." Forget it, Dave. It'll all get nicked.

But then Kroodsma crosses the border into Mexico, and the story takes off. As he works his way down Baja California, the landscape unfolds, and he meets the people. As the journey gets interesting, so does

Kroodsma. He's a tough traveller, and a good guest. By the time he gets to Mexico City, *The Bicycle Diaries* has become an engaging read.

The point at which I decided this was not just a good book, but a very good one, came when Kroodsma passed through a town called Caucasia in Colombia. There's nothing remarkable about the place; he just somehow brings it very much alive. This feeling of riding with Kroodsma gets stronger as he pedals over the northern Andes and into Venezuela, and southward into Brazil. Along the way there are fishermen, oil people, teachers, drunks and more. Then he makes a remarkable voyage with his bike up the Amazon to Peru, and has an even more extraordinary trip across the high cordillera to the Pacific coast. The man is a true adventurer. Woven into the narrative are Kroodsma's thoughts on the climate. This could indeed have been earnest and preachy, but Kroodsma has a light touch, and ties his remarks to the ecosystem he is passing through – coastal wetlands, agriculture, the high glaciers that provide water for Peru's cities. It isn't heavy; it's very interesting, and is also well-referenced.

Kroodsma doesn't quite have the magic touch of someone like Ted Simon or Eric Newby. But he is a good solid writer, and there is a lot to enjoy. There are also some great photos, all presented at the point in the narrative when they were taken (he stays with a family; their picture's on the same page). Moreover I felt a growing sympathy for Kroodsma himself. Besides being culturally sensitive, he's also very thoughtful. The climate evangelism ebbs away as he feels more and more that the people he is meeting are threatened by pollution that his country, not theirs, is causing. Meeting a Brazilian researcher in Manaus, he is told:

*"It's like, when you are in an elevator with a bunch of people, and one person just keeps on farting. That person needs to change what he eats." I laughed, at first not sure how to respond. "You guys are farting too," I said. "Yeah, but not nearly as much!"*

Kroodsma admits that since the USA pollutes more than all Latin America put together, he should perhaps continue his project there. He has since done just that (one can read more about this on his site at [climateride.com](http://climateride.com)).

I liked this book. It's a good travelogue, but also a vivid description of what may happen to a lot of places, and people, as the climate warms. Combining the two in this way might not have worked, but it does. It took a few pages to get into this book – but I am very glad I stuck with it.

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## **Megan says**

This book is an interesting mix between a global goal of healing climate change, and the individual reality of poverty throughout much of Latin America. I live in Mexico and I see this as I walk by discarded trash on the beach; that the U.S. and other countries like it can focus so much on environmental issues is a privilege. Developing countries certainly understand and in some cases have taken steps towards mitigating climate change, but when so many are struggling with basic needs for food, homes, education, etc., it can seem incredibly irrelevant to worry about the melting icecaps or deforestation or whether one is doing his or her part to protect the planet. I really appreciated the author's humility in recognizing that fact.

Also, if you have any interest in travel in Latin America this book will be paaaainful as it will make you want to immediately plan your own trip.

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## **D. Thrush says**

I enjoyed this book much more than I thought I would. This is the true story of a journey by bicycle from California to the southernmost tip of South America. Along the way, the writer, who is a climate scientist, visits schools and gives TV and radio interviews discussing climate change and how it will affect their regions and the world. He also meets many people who offer meals and open their homes to him. The generosity of strangers is heartening. Most of them are poor but still share what they have without hesitation. The book is scattered with facts about climate change in addition to information about each country he traverses. It was fascinating to read about how other people live and think, and about places like the salt flats. I was glad to see photos in the book as well. I highly recommend this book about a journey in more than miles.

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## **Colleen Ray says**

This book is well written and edited, and imparts a great deal of knowledge regarding global warming and climate change. Unfortunately, nothing much of interest happens during the author's travels.

If you're looking to learn facts about helping the environment, this will probably hold your interest; otherwise, I'd give it a pass.

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## **Luke Lavin says**

First thing first: I've read hundreds of papers on climate policy, communication, etc., and the more I read, the more opaque it is what's actually going to get people/governments to act in a modestly optimal way. Thus, while Kroodsma doesn't have all the answers, he shows proper humility and offers a unique perspective on the trials and travails of climate communication. His trip takes you through all the basic arguments—issues around development, equality, who should act first, climate debt, how this time is different than past climate changes, and why climate is generally pretty far down the list of public concerns—but in a kind of personal way that's more endearing than the common public polling/stats angle. He also allows the truth that while glaciers may recede, droughts may come, etc., until clean energy is affordable and widely deployable, there's really no way to deal with climate change ("focusing on climate change instead of poverty, then, seems like perhaps the wrong focus" etc.). His stories of visiting many schools all across the Americas are very much worth reading.

Second, there's the adventure angle. Being in my mid-20's and from a similar background to Kroodsma (I went to college in the town where he grew up & studied physics), it's hard to imagine walking away from early career opportunities and development to ride a bike for two years. And yet, if you don't do it at this age, when will it happen? It's always heartening to see people follow their dreams, even or especially at the cost of the other "right" opportunities, and Kroodsma's story makes it clear he's among the lucky and few who really take advantage of this opportunity. As I see it, there are two main things that those who come from a well-off background in this world can hope to do as a result of their opportunity: 1) follow their dreams, and 2) help others (not strictly the development sense of the term—personal relationships, friendships, etc. matter too). Though it may be an atypical path, Kroodsma has clearly done both, and that is both motivating and worthy of respect.

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### **Franck Marchis says**

In 2014 I met David in the Caltrain and he told me about his bike trip. I supported his Kickstarter campaign shortly after and received the book as an electronic file that I read only now (I finally got a Kindle for Xmas). David tells us about his trip to Latin America, describing the beauty and the issues of the countries that he has visited. He honestly describes his motivation (climate change) and his personal internal debates that he faced as an American traveling through a relatively underdeveloped area of the world. The story reminded me some of my trips in South America, including the casula encounters with fascinating and honest people, the surprises and disappointments met in some of the countries and finally some of the questions about poverty and economical development that he has raised. I recommend this book for those who like traveling, but also those who want a honest report on a travel throughout Latin America.

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### **Stephen says**

The Bicycle Diaries combines travel and climate-change advocacy, both literally as a trip and throughout the book. As Kroodsma makes his way through Mexico, Central America, and the mountainous roads of South America, he talks to locals, from retired presidents to impoverished farmers, about the ways their landscape is changing and discusses with them the ways climate change will further alter their homes, health, and livelihood. The book is thus a tour of these regions by bike and a survey of the various ways climate will affect the future, as seemingly every place he visits is imperiled either by development or by climactic alteration.

Although Peruvian villagers aren't exactly a primary source of problematic emissions, developing countries and their poor are the most at risk to future changes, and Kroodsma wanted to increase awareness on all fronts – communicating what he knew to people young and old as he cycled, learning from his discussions with people about their experiences. This a tale with great appeal, from the travel descriptions of varied landscapes (the beautiful Andes, salt flats the size of New Jersey, stupefyingly rich forests, to the candid interactions with people from the poor and marginalized to the wealthy and powerful. Kroodsma is continually amazed by the hospitality of strangers over the course of the year, and challenged by the fact that many people seem happy with their lives despite having so little. The spread of the internet into very remote places was also a pleasing surprise, as it meant more opportunities at less expense. The virtue of bicycles comes up quite often, as you might imagine -- from their travel merits (making it easier for Kroodsma to interact with people), to their environmental impact, to their role in making cities more livable places.

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### **Ladybug33 says**

I found this book to be well written with lots of interesting anecdotes of his travels. I thought the last section seemed a little rushed though. There is lots of detail of many parts of his journey and by the time he got to Patagonia it just skipped over that area, which I was a little disappointed about.

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## **Marvel says**

Interesting book - especially his opinions on the various countries he biked through. I cannot even imagine that type of journey. Also insightful as to global warming. We all (USA, Europe) leave huge carbon footprints on this planet.

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## **Zachary says**

I really enjoyed the honesty and reflection throughout this book. The author was never condescending or simplistic when discussing a situation. This applied to all issues, from personal to global policy.

I also enjoyed the descriptions of the landscapes and the people. Even though many people and awe-inspiring natural wonders were only in the story for a couple of pages, the little details were thoughtful and gave everything and everyone solid definition.

The 'how will climate change affect this area' paragraphs were also great. They connected to the people living in those areas and, like the rest of the book, delivered the complexity of the situation in an honest manner. Getting drawn in with great descriptions of the people and the land and then getting a glimpse of the changing future was very effective and engaging.

some quotes to remember...

"I noted that what I saw as impoverished - limited employment, sharing a crowded house without electricity - he saw as fortunate.

"My views are now more forward-looking, and they concern people more than carbon."

"The salt still stretched to the cool horizon, and claustrophobia was replaced by its opposite: the awe of too much space."

"As the show seemed to have progressed from serious to the less serious, I guessed I had somehow been the transition." (the occasional humor was fun...)

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## **Rich Mulvey says**

The subject of this book is one where an author can easily fall into the trap of becoming so preachy that they lose the reader; and while that does in fact happen a few times here, it's not so much that it made me want to give up on the book.

The book is framed as a bike travelogue in which the author plans to ride from California to the tip of South America so that he can discover what people outside the U.S. think about climate change. Generally he spends several pages discussing the ride, then a few paragraphs or pages on climate change as it relates to where he happens to be at the time.

It works pretty well, overall. There are a few sections in which he tends to go on and on about how guilty he feels about all of the poor people he encounters, but he doesn't stretch it out to unreasonable lengths.

One thing in particular that struck me is that the author is great at describing his interactions with people and the landscape; too many travelogues are an endless litany of "On Monday I went to X and saw Y, on Tuesday I went to A and saw B", etc, but in this book he avoids that.

All in all, I'd recommend the book.

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### **Kelly says**

I loved reading about David's adventures on his solo journey. Not only did it remind me of my own feelings and experiences of solo travel, but it taught me a great deal about the cultures and economies of countries I've yet to visit. I appreciated his honesty about his emotional experiences throughout.

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### **Alejandro says**

Author did an incredible job of recounting his journey. I felt that he grew from his experience and it shows in his growing confidence in his Spanish as well as his eventual relationship while on the trip. These for me were clear moments when he grew as a person and is ultimately what I want out of travelogues. I also appreciated how he not only interacted with locals, but grew ever more dependent on them for charity. It allowed him interactions with people in a way that gave us, the readers, some great insights into the places that he traveled. I would definitely recommend this to people to read and am hoping that the author has one more great journey within.

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### **Maryalice says**

A great book. I learned a lot about the people and places in South America. Fireman are such great people. DH and I are bikers, but that is much more of a ride then I would want to take.

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