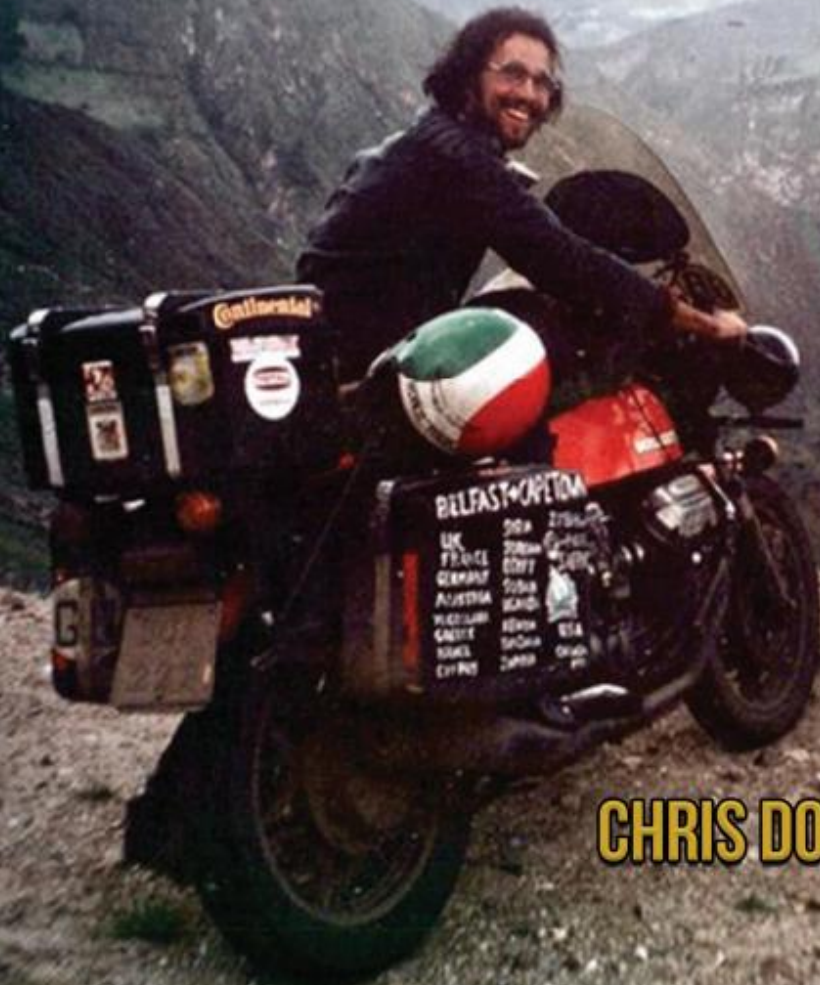


GOING THE WRONG WAY



Escaping 1970s Belfast on his Moto Guzzi Le Mans, Chris searches for himself and the road to Australia. What could possibly go wrong?

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Foreword

Since the Stone Age, the walkabout has been an Aboriginal rite of passage. It is when adolescent boys wander aimlessly into the bush on a journey with no particular destination. During this time, they make the spiritual transition from boy to man. It's a time for self-assessment and deep thought, when he can learn about himself without the influence of his elders, friends, or family. It's a physical and psychological journey. I didn't look like an Aboriginal adolescent as I set off from Belfast on my café racing Moto Guzzi, but looking back, I see that the same determination drove me to set off on a journey of self-discovery. I was twenty-one and, wanted to go 'somewhere' for 'some time' and, well, for 'something'! Australian society now views the walkabout with disdain; It encourages kids to avoid risks, to go with the flow, and to accept authority. The journeys we take in our modern lives are usually for pleasure. Young people may spend six months volunteering, or on a foreign eco holiday, but even these kinds of trips are pre-planned, and have been through rigorous health and safety checks. Should young people, both male and female, learn about themselves on a Walkabout now? We talk of "Millennials" and "Snowflakes," young, over-emotional and easily offended adults who are uninterested in anyone else's opinion. Over-educated, overworked and overwhelmed, they are on an organised path from cradle to grave. This desire drove me to break free from my mediocre, middle-class existence and reach out for the unknown. The demand was irresistible and bound me to an ancient ritual that many young men before me had taken for adventure.

INTRODUCTION

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Any exertion at 13,000 feet is exhausting, but pure torture for a man riddled with hepatitis. Just climbing one flight of stairs had me panting like a rabid dog. After riding down from the USA to South America, my plan had been to sell the bike to pay for the flight home. But the biggest bike in La Paz was a Honda 50, and no one wanted an 850cc Moto Guzzi. My only option was to beg my parents to send money. "Buenos Dias," I said to the operator who sat reading a Batman magazine. Great, I thought, my survival is reliant on a retard. "I want to send a telex." "Estados Unidos?" he said, glancing up at my jaundiced face. "No, Irlanda del Norte, Gran Bretaña." Looking irritated, he handed me the message pad; clearly a critical moment in Batman's plan to save Gotham City. "\$5 per line," he murmured. I printed the words as if it was the last message I would ever write. "I'm stuck in La Paz, run out of money. Please transfer £500 care of Bank of Bolivia, La Paz, at once." I watched the ticker tape flick through the machine and wanted to dive down the line back to the comfort and medical care of home. The silence as the spent paper tape hit the floor was deafening. That was it: my last effort spent. I paid and shuffled towards the door, hoping to get some word back the next day. In Belfast, Ken sat at his telex machine.

"What's happening? Send more info," he replied. The operator jumped as the machine spat back.

Responses arrived a few weeks later, not two minutes. "Hey Gringo, do you want to reply?" My status rose above the Penguin.

"No hay dinero," I said and shrugged my shoulders. I was down to my last five bucks.

"I give you ten words free," he said, excited to be back in the real world.

"Ok, send this."

"Hi Ken, send the money and wait for the book."

Well, here it is, 40 years later!"