



hassle of transporting one from home. In a bike shop in Panjim, Goa, he selected a low-budget model that the shop owner assured us was "India's top, up-and-coming brand".

A BROKEN BIKE, A LATE NIGHT

Eager to get moving again after a week of conference hospitality and an excess of local Goan cuisine, we heeded advice to start our journey 100km south on the coast, near the smaller town of Karwar. From there it was an 800km ride south, never far from the coastal artery road (the N66). We would pass through southern Goa and the state of Karnataka, and eventually reach Hope Community on the outskirts of Alappuzha in Kerala.

My handbike resembled a wagon train, with my wheelchair lashed to the back of my long recumbent, luggage thrown into its seat and additional bags strapped to the rear. With no camping equipment, we were traveling relatively light.

Just 700 metres into our journey, one of the pedals on Glyn's bike came loose. The thread was already stripped, and we began an urgent search for a new crank arm. It seemed that 'India's top cycle brand' was not so top! However, the wonderful thing about countries with less of a throwaway mentality is the willingness to mend, repair and improvise solutions. Though it took

“ It was January, and the thought of escaping a grey European winter and embarking on a warm bike adventure was irresistible ”

most of the day, we eventually got back on the road, eager to make up for lost time.

As the sun dipped lower, we found ourselves in the countryside between towns. With no accommodation at hand and no tent to rely on, we chased the fading light. Despite our intention never to cycle in the dark in India, we found ourselves obliged to do so. With two bikes and a wheelchair, hitching a ride wasn't always an option. Even the usually ubiquitous rickshaws had disappeared just when we needed them most.

My head torch reflected off the hand cranks, blinding me as it bounced light back into my eyes. Squeezed between a rocky escarpment and traffic trying to navigate the narrow, winding road, I felt

a surge of adrenaline and a knot of fear in my stomach. Every instinct screamed that we shouldn't be night riding. I was dismayed by the predicament we'd landed ourselves in, and I found myself silently thanking in advance the Indian gods for keeping us safe.

Three hours after



Fact file A ride to hope

Distance: 50-80km a day on average.

Route: Karwar, Goa to Hope Community Village on the outskirts of Alappuzha in Kerala. We roughly followed the N66 coastal road but used smaller roads where possible, travelling via Gokarna, Udupi, Mangalore, Kannur, Kozhikode, Bekal Fort, Fort Kochi and on to Alappuzha.

Conditions: Humid, dry weather that was unseasonably hot, averaging 30-35°C.

Accommodation: Guesthouses or small hotels that we found as we went along.

Maps/guides: We used a basic map of the area combined with Google Maps and online information.

I'm glad I had... Sun cream and a plentiful supply of bananas and lime soda.

Next time I would... Consider a route further inland through the Western Ghats.

Further info: The original reason for our visit to India was to attend the Purple Festival of Inclusion (purplefest.esg.co.in). We finished our trip at the Hope Community Village for children in care (hopekerala.org).