Cycling to India

When I was 11, during a junior school leavers' assembly in front of all the mums and dads, my headmistress asked my class what they wanted to do when they left school. Footballer, doctor, film star, politician, came the replies. My answer? "I want to cycle round the world and raise money for charity." A big "ahhhhh" resounded around the school hall. "So sweet."

Little did they know that 20 years later I would be setting off on a 9,000-mile journey to India. On my own. Carrying everything I needed on my steel-framed bicycle, affectionately known as "Shirley".

I would like to say it was planned to the nth degree and that everything ran like clockwork. In reality, I was arrested twice, chased by wild dogs, beaten (and wined and dined) by the mafia, attacked by bandits …

On my last day I was cycling through the Bandipur wildlife park in southern India. My flowery bike wasn't great camouflage and startled a number of elephants as I passed. They decided to charge.

The advice is: "if an elephant charges you, stand your ground, and bow your head to show respect". What tosh! With 30 tonnes of muscle and bone crashing towards me, destroying small trees and making the ground vibrate under my feet like an earthquake pounding, there was no way I was standing firm. I dropped my bike into third gear… and floored it.

Another time I ran out of food and water in the desert and was woken one morning to a tickling sensation on my chin. Tickling me like a feather, making me giggle. I woke – to find maggots in my hair and beard.

Yet the greatest memories are of so many wonderful people I met in every country, who invited me into their homes to celebrate local festivals, play music, dance, sing, eat, and share each other's cultures, beliefs, history and way of life.

Warm, radiant smiles glowing from beneath twinkling eyes of joy.

After six months' cycling, I rolled into Chembakolli, a tiny village, my final destination. It was my 31st birthday – 20 years since I had first dreamed up the idea. I was greeted by a carnival of people playing drums, singing, cheering, and waving banners saying "Happy birthday". All I could do was crouch down and cry tears of joy. I'd cycled 9,000 miles from England to India. I'd lived my dream.

**Questions: HOW does the author create tension and dramatic impact in the coloured lines?**