



need of a hospital, we detoured to a nearby tourist camp served by an airstrip – the tents stayed in the truck and we had hot showers (okay, warm dribbles).

Cleaned up and resting in my comfortable *ger*, a cement-floored version of the round, canvas-and-felt abodes of the Mongolian herdsmen, I considered shipping out with our wounded. My sprained ankle was still swelling. Plus we were having all kinds of trouble with the bikes, undoubtedly the hardest-working BMW Funduros anywhere. The rented 650cc singles all had 10,000 or more tough off-road miles showing and all wore the scars of battle. Already we'd broken two shock mounts, a couple of the bikes had horribly crunchy steering races, another dribbled oil from its cracked frame, and my

bike was going through fuses like there was an auto-parts store on every street corner. With eight days left, I wasn't sure which we'd run out of first: bikes or riders.

This trip was a scouting expedition for

“ Soon four more of us were on the ground. With eight days left, I wasn't sure which we'd run out of first: bikes or riders ”

a company wanting to run a tour of Mongolia, and short of calling in an air-evac helicopter (it was considered), we couldn't have got off to a shakier start.

Still, I was seeing an amazing country.

At one time the Mongolian empire was the greatest the world has ever known, stretching from Korea in the east to Hungary in the west, from Moscow in the north to Vietnam in the south. Led by Genghis Khan, the Mongol hordes – deadly archers on fast-moving horse-ponies – swept all before them. According to translations, Genghis claimed that his greatest pleasure in life was to 'cut my enemy to pieces, seize their possessions, witness the tears of those who are dear to them, and embrace their wives and daughters.' One suspects the Great Khan did not use the verb 'embrace.'

His heirs continued his empire-building, taking over much of the Arabian Peninsula and all of China, which they ruled for a century. The Forbidden City, Beijing's >



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