

Across the Steppes



As Lucille and Bob trekked across the Mongolian steppes – she on a Schwinn, and he on a Segway, until he drove into a giant antlion sand pit trap (he escaped, but the machine was a goner) – they kept feeling they were being followed. Both even heard what they later described as “rumbling growls, as if from a school of sarcastic sharks.” But whenever they glanced behind them, there was nothing there. This went on for days, slowing driving the pair crackers. Although their planned route was from the capital, Ulaan Baator, to Gurvansaikhan National Park in the south, they detoured from Khovd in the east all the way to Baruun Urt in the west in an attempt to escape their spectral pursuers. A vain one, as it turned out, for as their tenth day of trekking dawned, nine cameleers (not sharks!) emerged silently out of the morning fog. Meptang, the group’s leader, made threatening gestures with an astrolabe, so Lucille offered him her prized bicycle. Immediately, one of his subordinates produced a Dutch oven, threw the bike in, and began to cook it. Meptang and his colleagues were so focused on the heady aromas emanating from the pot that they didn’t see Lucille and Bob slip out of camp. Didn’t matter, really, because Meptang had no trouble tracking them, thanks to the personal locator beacon he’d long ago implanted one of Bob’s teeth. But *why?! And that really is the question, isn’t it, dear reader?*