

The Jolly Pilgrim

By Peter Baker

Synopsis

The Jolly Pilgrim is a travelogue extravaganza, which unfolds through a series of emails and culminates by setting out a modern, innovative and profoundly optimistic world view.

It begins with the author leaving London and travelling, by bicycle, to Istanbul in the expectation of meeting the object of his desire on the far side of the world. During that first 6,500-kilometre, five-month leg of the journey he reads the Bible in full and spends 12 days in a Croatian infection hospital after being attacked by killer bees. Every week he writes a short email about his activities to a small group of friends.

On failing to win the love he seeks the author is left abandoned, broken and struggling with a physical deformity he thought long-conquered (he has two club feet). The subsequent adventures take him through 28 countries and five continents over a two-year period. During that time he works in a Sydney drag club, reads the Qur'an in full, hitchhikes across Australia, is hospitalised by bees for a second time and dances salsa before a cheering crowd of inmates in a Latin American women's prison.

Over that period the author is subject to a number of affecting experiences concerning the history and prehistory of humanity. On reaching Ecuador he finds himself impelled to undertake a mission to promote a more realistic discussion within the human race about itself. He therefore goes into hermitage on the slopes of *El Panecillo*, in the Quito valley.

There he draws upon his experiences, the reaction to his email diary, his study of Christian and Islamic scripture, his degree in physics and wide knowledge of current evolutionary and economic theory to synthesise a modern and educational narrative of the collective human condition. During the story's final stages, travelling across South America, that narrative is set out in written form.

The thesis which emerges represents a fusion of modern knowledge. It is intended to make both the science and the religious texts more accessible and provide readers with an array of interesting insights into the twenty-first century world. In setting these ideas down in a book, the author aspires to make them easier to absorb by weaving them into a real human story to which anyone can relate.

The Jolly Pilgrim is an attempt to say genuinely original things in a genuinely original way and, more than anything, it is a message of hope.

Background and structure

The story consists of two parallel narratives:

- 1) an email diary written by the author while circling the planet between May 2005 and June 2007
- 2) a commentary on that story

The emails are written in the informal and light-hearted manner of correspondence between friends. They form the core narrative and progress in real time with the journey. The commentary is stylistically distinct and addressed straight to the reader. This dual structure is used to keep the story twisting, turning and full of surprises.

Manuscript parameters

The manuscript is 144,000 words long.

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Publishing and support strategy

Why the travelogue is innovative

The standard method of writing a travel book is to plan it, embark on the journey, take notes, return home and write the book.

The Jolly Pilgrim, on the other hand, is a spontaneous literary creation. The first chapter starts with an email Peter Baker wrote in 2005 after cycling across Kent and the two-year narrative which follows is uncontrived and was recorded in real time. That exceptionally diverse series of adventures and human encounters concludes with something one could not plan for or make up – a call to arms for humanity to be more honest about itself.

While comparable to travel writing of Bruce Chatwin, Patrick Leigh Fermour and Jack Kerouac, the works it most emulates are the parable-style travel stories *The Celestine Prophecy* by James Redfield and *The Alchemist* by Paul Coelho. *The Jolly Pilgrim* is of a different order of intellectual coherence to either of those books, and while those are works of fiction, this is a work of fact.

The book's cultural and intellectual significance

In extreme summary, the book's thesis reinterprets the human world from first principles: namely, that we're a fallible species of carbon-based life forms living in a mysterious universe without a rule book.

Examples:

- Our current environmental issues are reframed as the beginning of a phase of environmental instability which became inevitable 12,000 years ago, with the development of agriculture.
- Contemporary religious systems are reframed as the current form of a spiritual inheritance which has been evolving since humans became behaviourally modern, 50,000 years ago.
- The credit crisis is reframed as one in a long line of learning experiences implicit to working out (from scratch) how to manage a planetary economy.

No one in popular culture is setting out this larger historical context to modern life. When someone does (and sooner or later, someone is bound to), not only will it catalyse a reassessment of many areas of human interest, people will start to find their lives more meaningful and the travails of the present day less frightening.

This isn't a set of themes that will run out of juice during the twenty-first century. To get the ball rolling, my first vehicle is an around-the-world true story of heartbreak and gritty human drama to which anyone will relate.

The author

By his early twenties I was ghost-writing technical articles for partners at global insurance consultancies. He was awarded \$5,000 by *The Economist* for the essay *The World In 2050*. He's spent four years travelling the world, visited 50 countries, lived in five, worked in three, and pursued lifelong interests in physics (in which he has a degree) and evolutionary anthropology.

Finally, delivering an artistic and intellectual project as ambitious as *The Jolly Pilgrim* required the emotional wherewithal to write while living in a one-room shed and caring for my dying mother (for a year) then spending every weekend and holiday finishing it off (for two years) while holding down a 55-hours-a-week City job.

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Appendix to Book Pitch

Structural summary

There are 10 chapters, each describing one geographic phase of the journey and broken into subchapters with a median length of 600 words. Each subchapter reads like its own short story. Each chapter reads like its own novella.

The early chapters concentrate on the story of the operational and emotional issues involved in my two-year, around-the-world journey. From Chapter 6 the narrative becomes increasingly philosophical. During the last two chapters (and final third of the word count) the story grows into a deliberate attempt to set out a modern narrative of the collective human condition to the reader.

Chapter-by-chapter synopsis

Chapter 1: The Bicycle Ride

A 150-day bicycle ride from London to Istanbul (travelling through France, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey) during which I lived in the wilderness and covered 6,429 kilometres. During that period I had my heart broken, spent 12 days in a Croatian infection hospital, read the Bible in full and was surrounded by feral dogs in a Bulgarian forest.

Every theme running through the book is introduced during Chapter 1, including its key observation regarding the short time frames over which humans assess their world. In the commentary I describe how I gave up my job and life in London in order to undertake the journey.

Word count: 25,800

Chapter 2: Metropolis

Forty days living in Istanbul, during which I set up an informal community based around a hotel, engaged a wide group of Turkish and non-Turkish friends and swam the Bosphorus in near-zero temperatures.

Chapter 2 explores the significance of several talismanic historical sites (notably the Aya Sophia, the Rumelihisari and Troy) in and near the city. In the commentary I describe how the book's thesis was shaped by my 40 days living within an international community in a location steeped in history.

Word count: 7,900

Chapter 3: Asian Fluctuations

Following a one-night stand with an English woman in Istanbul I pursued her to Asia. With four days to spare before our meeting I visited Cambodia where I was robbed by motorcycle thieves and temporarily stranded. Chapter 3 concludes with my bribing the local police, making my way back to Thailand and meeting my lover in Bangkok.

I use the contrast between Cambodia and Thailand to consider the historical context of the world's economic geography. The experience of dealing with the Cambodian constabulary is used to examine governance and corruption.

Word count: 4,100

Chapter 4: Down Under

When I arrived in Australia, everything went wrong.

In this chapter the double-narrative structure is employed to tell the same story from two angles. The public-at-the-time version tells of passing through Melbourne, then moving to Sydney to find a house and a job.

In the commentary I describe how my friend in Melbourne had a breakdown, the companions I was due to meet up with pulled out at the last minute, I was tormented by my club foot, admitted to hospital with an inguinal hernia and sent into financial meltdown.

Word count: 8,300

Chapter 5: Hindustan

I attended a wedding in India in the hope of resurrecting my relationship with the love interest introduced in Chapter 1. That hope was dashed.

Chapter 5 ends with me back in Australia and my plans in tatters – a global loose end that provoked the intellectual journey which lead to this book.

Word count: 5,200

Chapter 6: The Boiling Pot

From Chapter 6 the narrative style changes to reflect the fact that, by this point, I was knowingly using the journey as a vehicle for exploring the ideas set out in the final two chapters.

The diary records five months living in Sydney's bohemian quarter, working for an international law firm during the day and at a drag club in the evenings.

In the commentary I deal with three themes which support the book's final thesis. First, how extant religious faiths can be viewed as the current form of a religious dynamic which has been evolving since prehistory. Second, describing the changes wrought to human society by the invention of agriculture, circa 10,000 BCE. Third, describing humanity's colonisation of the globe after circa 80,000 BCE.

Word count: 14,000

Chapter 7: Magical Mystery Tour

I hitchhiked 2,800 kilometres along Australia's east coast from Sydney to Cairns, encountering an eclectic mixture of hippy intellectuals, crackpots and beach bums.

The commentary deals with one main theme – the fact that the human brain is hardwired to think about the world in a specific, narrow way and how that causes human discourse to focus upon a restricted range of topics.

Word count: 12,700

Chapter 8: On Bread Loaf Mountain

I travelled to Ecuador, where I rented a rustic apartment (on the hill of *El Panicello* in Quito's Old Town) from a local artisan. There I isolated myself from the wider world in order to deliberately and systematically set out the ideas for which this book is a vehicle.

In this chapter I describe my creative process and how the isolation which that process necessitated led to my experiencing a gentle form of madness. A major sub-theme of this chapter is the series of events set in motion by the Spanish Empire's sixteenth-century conquest of the Andes.

Word count: 11,100

Chapter 9: Global Deconstruction

After leaving Quito I travelled south across the Amazon and Andes to the Pacific coast, then through Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina to Buenos Aires. From Chapter 9 the narrative style changes once again and, for the rest of the book, the travel story acts as the backdrop to 14 flagship subchapters which set out the book's thesis.

Ten of those 14 subchapters are contained in Chapter 9. In brief, they deal with the following:

- 1) Describing how contemporary forms of government represent one phase in a linear evolution of human political systems set in motion by the invention of agriculture circa 10,000 BCE.
- 2) Setting current environmental issues (particularly climate change) in their historical context.
- 3) Pointing out how free speech and political liberty, in addition to being morally desirable, are features of the only available systems for coordinating civilisation over long time frames.
- 4) Explaining how well-established science demonstrates that the disparities in economic and political power between peoples of different ethnicities are an inevitable side effect of 70,000 years of human migration and the geographic realities of planet Earth.
- 5) Setting out the view that modern economic theory has now established the essentials of how the human race should coordinate the logistics of its global civilisation.
- 6) Pointing out that, despite ongoing angst over what are in essence short-term economic setbacks, the broad sweep of human civilisation's economic development is comprehensively positive.
- 7) Arguing that the historical patterns which led to disparities in economic and political power between peoples of different ethnicities are now aligned to promote long-term equality between peoples.
- 8) Setting out the view that, when understood in historical context, the economic and political rise of China is one of the most profoundly healthy developments of all time.
- 9) Putting the War on Terror, the War in Iraq and contemporary geopolitics in their historical context and arguing that there is good reason to believe that the world is currently moving towards an epoch of unparalleled peace and harmony.
- 10) Providing the reader with long-term data on human welfare (including life expectancy, disease, literacy, homicide rates and nutrition rates) which support my argument that, in every way which can be measured, the early twenty-first century is the greatest golden age the world has yet seen.

Chapter 9 concludes with me living, briefly, in the apartment of a local *porteña* woman in the Buenos Aires suburb of Palermo.

Word count: 37,100

Chapter 10: Pilgrim Unplugged

The travel story in Chapter 10 consists of leaving Buenos Aires, heading north through Paraguay to Brazil, then travelling up the Atlantic coast to Rio and finally through Amazonia to Guyana on the Caribbean coast. That acts as the backdrop for the final four flagship subchapters which form the crescendo of the book's thesis. In brief, they deal with the following:

- 11) Setting out my view that (contrary to what is usually stated) the broad dynamic of the human adventure is profoundly, almost incredibly, positive and that its most arresting feature is its apparent endlessness.
- 12) Setting out my view that the phenomenon of religion is most completely understood as the intellectual framework which has grown up in human societies in order to think about our individual and collective relationship to the infinite.
- 13) Setting out my view that our sense of individuality – which defines so much about human world systems – is, in essence, an artefact of human cognitive architecture. I then describe a broader

view of the human condition and climax with a discussion of individual mortality, death and the profound (and, at this point in history, unexamined) transitions that humanity will one day face.

- 14) As the travel story concludes, I summarise my experience of the modern institution of travelling and pay homage to the extraordinary world I've explored. I then state my view that the people who deserve the most admiration are the ones who go to work every day, maintain households and hold families together.

Chapter 10 concludes with me staying with friends in the tiny Caribbean state of Guyana and preparing for my return to the UK.

Word count: 17,800

These are the sales documents used to sell *The Jolly Pilgrim* by Peter Baker. They are provided for the interest of writers or aspiring writers looking to publish a book.

The finished product was first released by HotHive Books in 2011. It is available on Kindle, at Apple's iBookstore, and as a paperback from all good book stores and [from Amazon](#).

www.thejollypilgrim.org