

TRAILING TURKEY



Cynthia King took a flight to Dalaman and explored the Aegean coast of Turkey.

Pics: Paolo Rosi

Goats balk at the speed and hum of churning pedals, skittering off into the bushes.

Toppled Roman pillars and broken building stones five feet thick line the path, and somewhere at the top of this stone-strewn hill is an amphitheatre dating back to the time of St Paul.

At its least, off road biking gives a sense of adventure, of crunching on dirt never crunched by a mountain bike before. But in Turkey, manouvreing a mountain bike around sharp stones, through heat which seems to vacuum air from the lungs and send steady rivulets of sweat into the eyes, gives an extraordinary sense of accomplishment.

Pee Wee Herman style bikes with foot brakes dominate the Turkish bike scene, so our high tech, multi gear machines were viewed with amazement. Even bus-bound tourists broke into a sweat just looking at us.

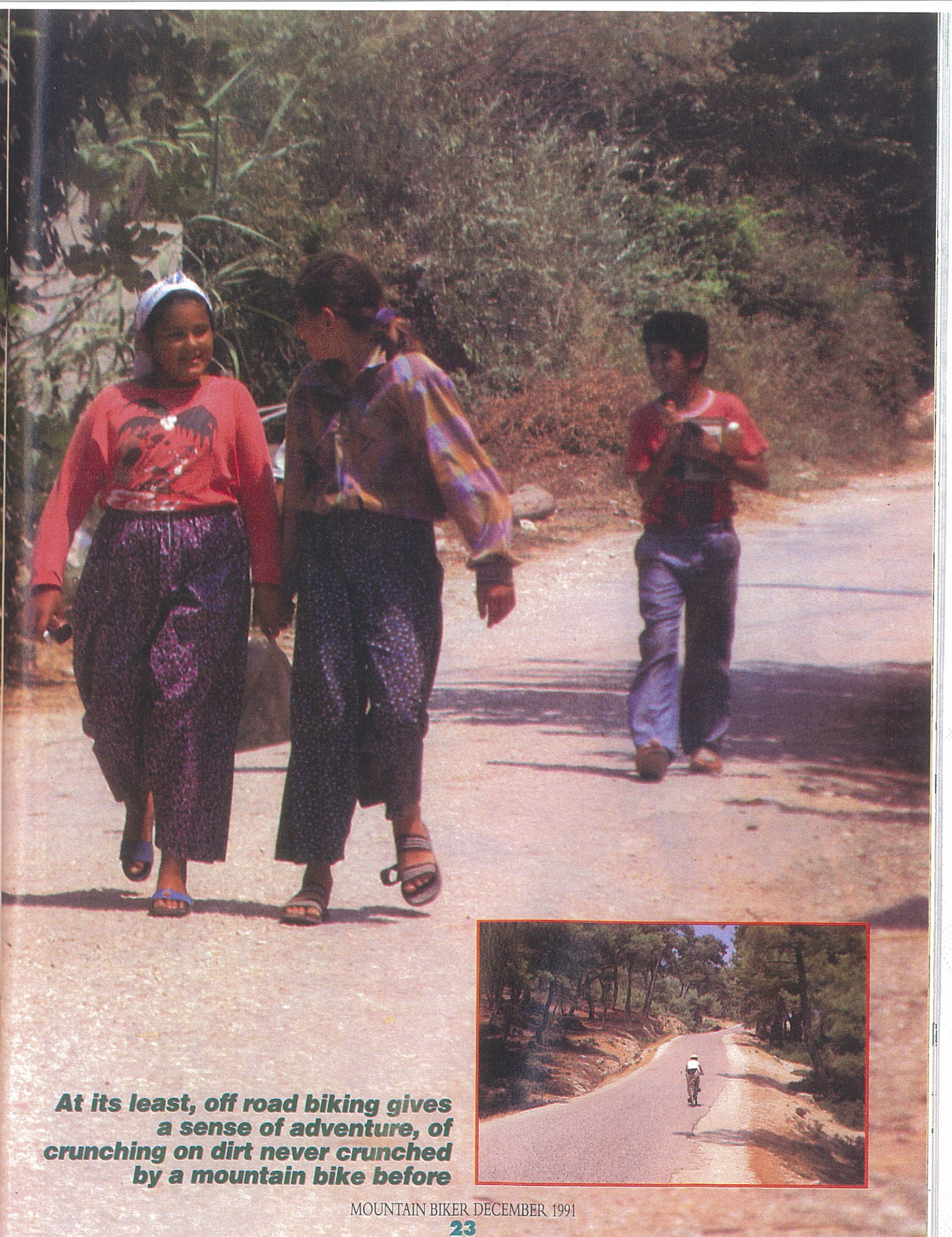
But mountain bikers get the last laugh. Creating our own breeze to keep cool in the oppressive heat, we left tourists behind, striking out onto dirt farmers' tracks to bike and walk among ruins they will never even know exist.

We touched down at Dalaman airport to be greeted by 90 degrees Fahrenheit – and it was almost 9pm. After a night in the neighbouring city of Kalis, we unpacked our bikes and cycled to the nearby town of Fethiye to catch a minibus to Patara where serious cycling begins.

New Patara is a beach town; tourists flock to its famous 'turtle beach' with miles of white sand and waves meant for hours of pure body surfing pleasure. Outside the tourist resort lie the ruins of a 2,000 year old Roman city. Dirt tracks and a gravel road lead the way to ancient Patara's port, amphitheatre, baths and temple.

It's a tough climb up to the amphitheatre, perched near the top of the hill. The two-foot-wide path takes you through prickly bushes, over pointy stones embedded in the red earth and to huge boulders over which bikes have to be heaved.

At the top it's worth it. Past the circular steps the countryside lies below – broken monuments, traces of the foundations of a ruined city on the opposite hill, and dunes created after the port silted over. After sucking warm water from our



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