



THE CLIMATE CYCLE

IN CONVERSATION WITH KATE STRONG

Kate Strong’s Climate Cycle project starts with an idea: what if we can each create one ripple, and send those ripples out through our relationships, our communities, our country, and the whole shared world? What if one person really can affect change? ‘I doubted myself every day. I asked myself all the time if what I was doing was just self-indulgent, or if I was actually making any difference. I think that self-doubt was really important in ensuring that I truly did work to make a difference.’

Kate set off solo from London to pedal around the UK and raise awareness about climate change, visiting communities to engage in conversations about sustainable living. Along the way, she would collaborate with local environmental organisations, visit schools, participate in tree-planting events, support green energy projects, and listen to the stories of those on the front lines of the climate crisis.

Armed with nothing but her custom-built bamboo bicycle, a few chosen clothing items, camping equipment, and her laptop and filming gear, she had 3,000 miles ahead of her. ‘Bamboo performs like any other modern bike – you honestly wouldn’t know the difference while riding it. But it has a very distinct aesthetic, and for that reason it was a great conversation starter. People would come over to ask about the bike, and then minutes later we’d be chatting about the project.’ ▶▶

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PHOTOGRAPHY: XXXXX????

But even trying to be minimalist in her belongings, the total weight of the rig took a toll. 'At 30kg, the bike and gear was nearly half of my own body weight, so it was a lot to move. In the first ten days I had so many punctures from my tyres not being able to cope with such a heavy weight, and the road conditions. I had to stop and get new ones fitted.'

She would either camp in her tent, or stay with hosts who offered her spare rooms or couches to sleep on. Some days she would cycle big distances to get to the next location, and other days would be filled with engagement meetings in local communities. Climate Cycle wasn't just about cycling; it was about mobilising individuals to consider their role in the global climate effort.

'I believe that most people want to do good – most people want to be seen as the heroes and not the villains. But the vast majority of people are very unaware of how much the climate crisis is affecting us in the UK. Even most people who are engaged tend to do something, and then stop there. For example making one lifestyle change but still maintaining other climate-heavy practices. Doing "something" is good, but we are now at the precipice of total collapse, and doing "a little bit" is no longer enough. And in order to grow, we have to start accepting ourselves as the villains in the climate story. If we can accept that, we can move forward to try to become the heroes.'

The physical journey itself wasn't easy. There were days when Kate's legs ached, and the brutal British winds seemed determined to physically push her backwards. Cycling in Cornwall, she found hillier terrain than expected, and was out in gale-force winds when the pressure and fatigue from many weeks on the road caught up with her, and she hit her low point.

'My body was hurting. I was tired. Then I turned a corner and hit a wall of wind so intense that I just stopped and burst into tears. My average was already only 6mph, and I had 60 miles to go still that day. It felt like too much. So I just started to cry, and I felt angry at the wind. Angry at it for trying to stop me from what I was trying to do.

'Then a voice in the wind spoke to me. It said: "We only push you as hard as you need to make you stronger. You haven't got to your breaking point yet." And then I felt so empowered, knowing that I was getting stronger, and I would not break. I could have called my mate to pick me up. I could have quit. But I didn't, and

I never did.' In contrast to this low point, when I asked about her high point, she simply said: 'Same answer as above. That day was so significant.'

Many days, people would ride with Kate, following her location on her website and an open invitation to join in with the challenge. She met enthusiastic supporters and she met people with different opinions. And that is, of course, the greatest challenge we face in raising awareness: getting out of the echo chambers and communicating with opposing views.

'I'm trying to lovingly engage the "inert masses" – those that haven't taken any action yet. I'm trying to understand their external barriers and help them through behavioural change. I learned from some people that there is fear of job loss (harkening from even the Thatcher era), and that taught me how to try to understand the barriers some individuals or communities might be facing. I also can see how I am considered "extreme" in my lifestyle choices, so I try to soften and show where even I make mistakes in my carbon footprint. Not everyone is prepared to appear as abnormal as I do, but still everyone can and needs to do more.'

While many days did not fill Kate with hope for our climate future, many school visits were invigorating. 'I did a visit in mid-Wales to a school that had a handful of eco projects and it was really great to see. I asked the students which they were most proud of, and they showed me an apple tree that had its first fruits. The tree had actually been planted by past pupils, children who never got to see the tree bear any fruit, but still put so much loving effort into making something for future students to enjoy – which they really were. I think it was a great analogy for caring for our future, and it was really encouraging to see that children do have that understanding and desire to leave nice things for the future generations.'

When Kate got back to London three months later, it felt like nothing had changed, and she needed a few months to recover and recalibrate. 'It was a life-changing experience for me and changed the level to which I feel I am willing to work for this cause. It was a great project for who I was back then, but if I did it again I know I would change a few things to have a greater impact.

But it was the best I could have delivered for who I was a year ago, and I'm eternally grateful for having that experience.'



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