

WHAT'S BUGGING YOU

Travelling through Mongolia's Gobi Desert and sleeping with nomads in their gers (felt tents) is an incredible experience. The vast lonely countryside, the unforgiving glare of the midday sun – it all helps put life's problems into perspective. So does getting lice in your shorts.

I don't know how I got them; one moment I was crab free and the next, there was a party in my shorts and the lice were inviting friends. I feared by the next day I would have more wildlife in my pants than the rest of the Gobi combined. I was practically becoming a National Park, worth protecting. Maybe I had picked them up from an infected bed; maybe I had gotten too close to a yak – who can say.

Sure, pubic lice down your pants may sound fun but it made me very depressed. I was hundreds of kilometres from a pharmacist, let alone one who might actually stock lice treatment and so, in desperation, I decided to shave off all my body hair. I know in some circles hairless bodies are considered de rigueur, but the sight of my hairless wanger has left me with unresolved issues.

The thing with deserts is that water is somewhat scarce. I'm not an anthropologist or anything, so don't quote me, but I'm pretty sure it's considered rude to shave your crotch in a Mongolian family's only barrel of water.

So there I was, pants around my ankles, standing over a pit latrine, flashlight clenched between teeth and armed with my friend Steph's pocket knife (she doesn't know this) and a blunt razor with no water. I'm not going to say any more, other than it got messy.

Steph had been incredibly supportive (from a distance of about 10 feet) and recommended that I bathe the infested area with iodine for good measure. This would have stained my skin yellow and while I may have been hairless, at least everything was still the right colour. I could not face the prospect of having a bald, bright yellow wanger. I'm sure Marco Polo didn't have to deal with this kind of crap.

Unfortunately I was doing one last inspection by shining the torch down my pants when our jeep driver walked in. It is very difficult to mime, with any degree of respectability, what I was trying to accomplish. Never had the language barrier felt more acute than when caught searching for body lice in my undies under the disgusted stare of a Mongolian herdsman.



Yaks grazing in front of a Mongolian ger. During the day these yaks, along with the goats, were free to wander off and graze in the surrounding countryside. At nightfall they returned to their respective camps and patiently waited to be milked.