



— FROM THE ROAD —

## *Writing Excerpts*

A few stories taken from posts on our travel blog:  
[A DANGEROUSBUSINESS.COM](http://ADANGEROUSBUSINESS.COM)



## “Is this enough fat?”

February 15, 2010 • [adangerousbusiness.com](http://adangerousbusiness.com)

We'd been in Mongolia for about 36 hours and were sitting on footstools around a small, low table inside a ger. My wrist was starting to ache and Anjel had developed a blister on her right index finger from the large cleaver. We were getting tired, but there was a large pile of still-frozen mutton in front of us, and the dumplings weren't going to make themselves, so we kept chopping.

We weren't the only ones working. Mr. Ghambataar was sitting with us, going through his pile of meat like butter while his wife was preparing dough from scratch. There was a fire going in the stove and the Ger was warm, which was nice because on the other side of the felt walls it was -45°F. We paused to sip from the ever-present cups of hot Milk Tea – but not too much since after dinner we were going to have our last chance to go outside to use the toilet before the dogs were unchained for the night. “If you need to use the toilet at night,” our host warned us through the translator “wake me up. It is not safe for you to go by yourself.”

Even our translator, Baagii (Baggy), a young man of 23, studying tourism and just beginning to work as a guide, had gotten pulled into dinner preparations. He was hacking large chunks off the still-hooved leg for us to mince and had just handed me another steak-sized piece of fat, when he surveyed the pile of raw meat

on the table and asked “is this enough fat? Or would you usually use more?”

Spending several days out on the Mongolian steppe, it was hard to find things that didn't highlight what a foreign world we had wandered into – yet the more time we spent there the more we found to love about the country.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

## *The Pony Express*

*August 13, 2009 · adangerousbusiness.com*

As we travelled east along Highway 50, we passed several historic small towns that listed Pony Express stations as part of their claim to fame.

The Pony Express was established in April 1860 and shortened the travel time of mail from the Atlantic Coast to the Pacific Coast to 10 days – a shockingly short period of time considering that the Pony Express was covering nearly 2000 miles of the cross-country route; from the Mid-West to the West Coast.

About 190 Pony Express stations were set up every 10 miles along the route (the rough distance a horse could travel at a full gallop) and the riders had a strict limit on what they could carry.

Riders could weigh no more than 125 pounds, and in addition to the 20 pound sack of mail, they would carry a water sack, a Bible, a horn for alerting the relay station master to prepare the next horse, a revolver, and a choice of a rifle or a second revolver. Eventually the baggage was cut down to simply the mail pouch, water sack and a single revolver.

What I found most interesting was the fact that for as large a part as the Pony Express seems to play in our national history, it existed for less than 18 months; from April 1860 to October 1861.

The service was closed down 3 days after the first trans-continental telegraph line was completed.



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## *Riding Iceland*

February 4, 2011 • [adangerousbusiness.com](http://adangerousbusiness.com)

Vatnajökull is the largest glacier in Iceland, and at over 3,000 square miles, covers more than 8% of the country. In the south east, between the towns of Skaftafell and Höfn a portion of the glacier (large enough to have its own name: Breiðamerkurjökull) flows down towards the ocean where it has formed a giant glacier lagoon.

The glacier can be seen from miles away as one travels the main highway, but the lagoon itself (Jökulsárlón; literally “Glacier Lagoon”) is hidden until you finally reach the point where it empties into the ocean, flowing underneath the Glacial River Bridge.

Turning off the main road, parking the bikes in a small dirt lot and walking over a gentle rise, the lagoon comes into view in an utterly surreal sight.

The still waters of the lagoon mirror the clouds in the sky and the massive icebergs, calved from the glacier, alternate in color between a milky white and a luminous blue as the light strikes them at different angles.

It is an absolutely breathtaking sight and as we stood in that surreal location, enjoying some of the most amazing riding we’ve done, it was amusing to look back on the random chain of events that brought us there in the first place.



## *Mongols and Christopher Columbus*

July 15, 2009 • [adangerousbusiness.com](http://adangerousbusiness.com)

I recently finished reading *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* by Jack Weatherford, a fantastic book on the history of Genghis Khan and the Mongols. As with all empires, the Mongol dynasty had its high point and its eventual collapse – and just like Rome, the Mongol dynasty had been so large and solid, that its disappearance was unthinkable.

*“With so many empires striving to maintain the illusion of the Mongol Empire in everything from politics to art, public opinion seemed obstinately unwilling to believe that it no longer existed. Nowhere was the belief in the empire longer lasting or more important than in Europe, where, in 1492, more than a century after the last khan ruled over China, Christopher Columbus convinced the monarchs Isabella and Ferdinand that he could reestablish sea contact and revive the lost commerce with the Mongol court of the Great Khan. With the breakup of the Mongol communication system, the Europeans had not heard about the fall of the empire and the overthrow of the Great Khan. Columbus, therefore, insisted that although the Muslims barred the land route from Europe to the Mongol court, he could sail west from Europe across the World Ocean and arrive in the land described by Marco Polo.”*

In addition to my years of classroom education on American History, I’ve read a couple great books on the journey of Christopher Columbus (*Pastwatch: The Redemption of Christopher Columbus* by Orson Scott Card and *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* by Charles C. Mann).

But, as far as I can remember, never once did the topic of the Mongols ever come up in any of those. I think it’s one of the reasons that I’ve been so intrigued by them – they played such a huge role in world history, and yet hardly raise a blip on the radar in all the general history I’ve read.



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## *Museum of Soviet Arcade Games*

january 5, 2010 • [adangerousbusiness.com](http://adangerousbusiness.com)

It was only 6:30 in the evening, but this was December and Moscow had already been dark for two hours. We'd been scheduled to spend 4 nights in the city, but transportation complications caused by the bombing of the train line between St. Petersburg and Moscow 4 days earlier had delayed our arrival and given us only one full day in the city. We spent that day running around to see as much as we could: Red Square, St. Basil's Cathedral, Lenin's Tomb, The Kremlin... we were exhausted but as we navigated the busy subway we were probably more excited than we'd been all day.

To be honest, we really weren't sure what to expect. What we'd read about the museum seemed amazing, but the small print was a little strange: It was only open 2 or 3 days a week, and not until 7:30 at night. The articles I'd read never mentioned anyone else being in the museum, so we wondered if the reporters had arranged private tours or we were about to visit a guy sitting by himself in a basement. Regardless, we figured that whatever happened it would be an amusing adventure.

It was only about a 5 minute walk from the subway to the school, a brick building on the corner that didn't look much different from the apartments that surrounded it. There were a few uneven steps leading up to a metal door where a small, unlit sign identified it, in Cyrillic, as the Moscow State Technical University. We walked through the door and found ourselves in a small lobby facing a guard sitting behind a desk a few feet away. Just to the right of the guard was a flight of stairs heading down. Not speaking any Russian, we gestured to the basement and said "Here to see the museum?"

"музей?" (muz-yey?) he replied, to which we nodded vigorously. He got on the phone and in a minute an excitable guy with a wild head of hair came hustling up the stairs. Speaking to us quickly and only in Russian, he buzzed us through the turnstile and led us downstairs.

