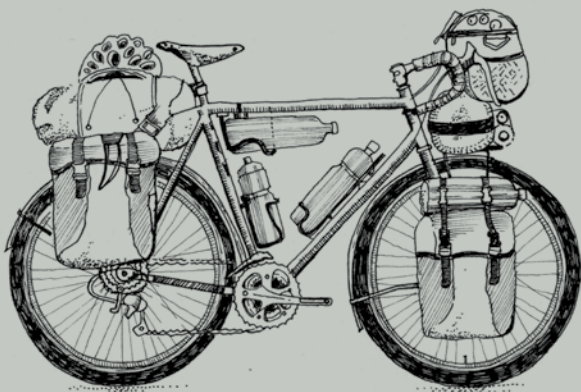
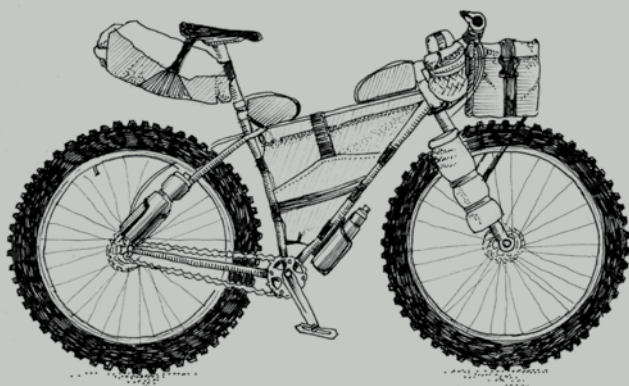


**Endurance setup** — an ultralightweight setup with minimal luggage to race long distances unsupported. This setup prioritizes speed and performance over comfort and leisure.



**Cycle touring setup** — The classic bike touring setup with panniers and racks that can haul plenty of luggage. This is widely considered the ideal setup for long journeys around the world, where comfort and versatility are more important than speed.



**Bikepacking setup** — For bikers who continue when the road runs out. The big tires have maximum control on rough terrain, and light luggage is directly strapped to the frame instead of with racks and panniers, allowing for clearance in narrow gullies and bushy trails.

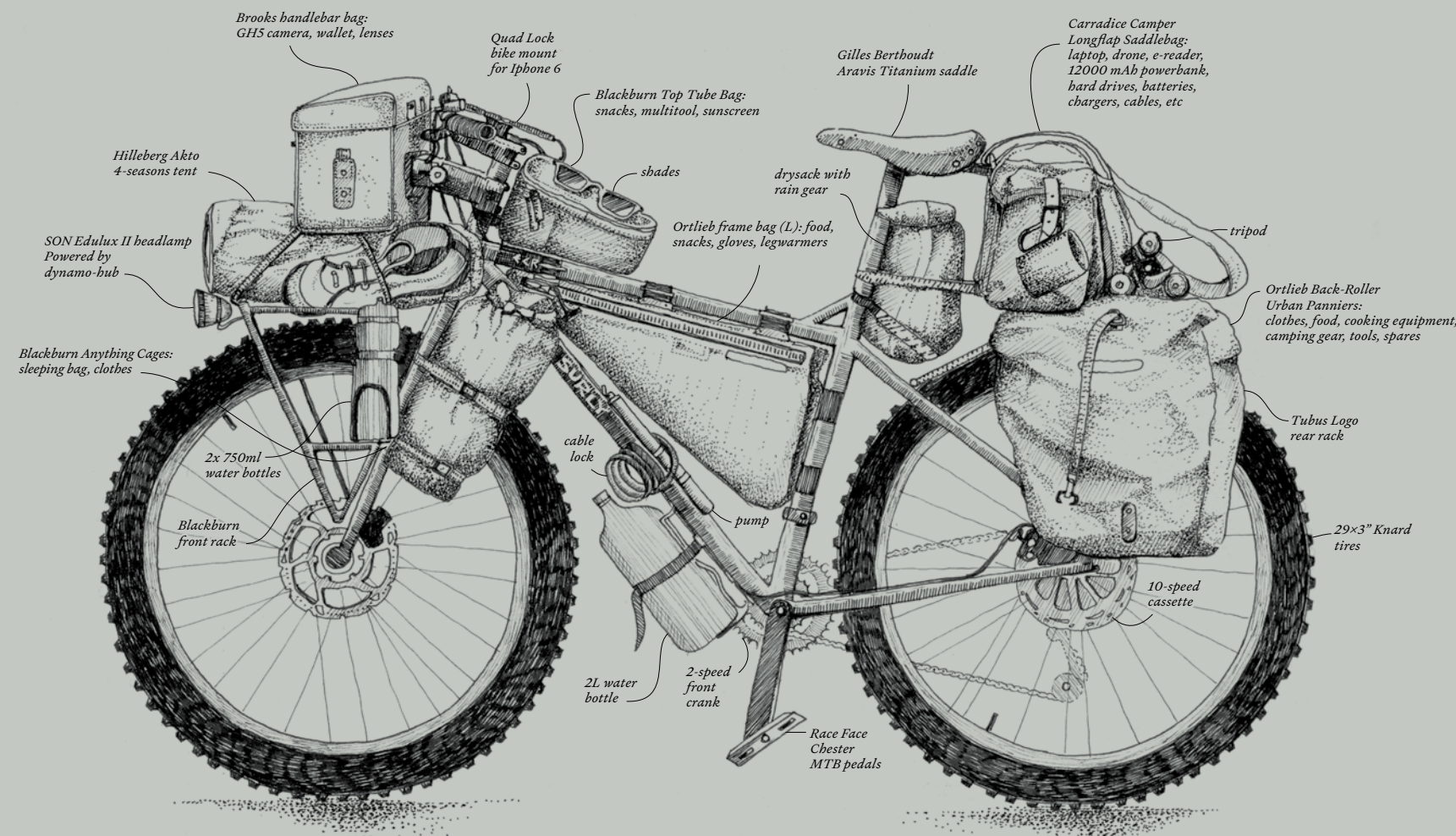
## Preparation — Choosing a bike

It goes without saying that the bike itself deserves thorough contemplation before setting off on such a big journey. I've met dozens of bike travelers from all corners of the world, and each one does it differently. It's best not to get bogged down in fretting over the "right" setup. When I remember meeting local bicycle travelers in India or Bolivia, navigating long distances on cheap Chinese racing bikes with their belongings stuffed in cardboard boxes and strapped onto self-fabricated racks, I see that it ultimately doesn't matter much. If there's a will, there's a way.

At the same time, there are more options than ever, and as a cyclist with access to them, settling on the optimal setup is a fun puzzle. Decades ago, it was simpler. You had city bikes for commuting, mountain bikes for dirt, and race bikes for speed. In today's world, there's a plethora of newborn subcategories that mix and match tire sizes, geometry, handlebar shapes, and packing opportunities—the choices are dazzling. You may have found your perfect bike to spend your Sundays in the local backcountry, but as it turns out, the forest department has just repaved the trails with a slightly finer type of gravel, and it just so happens that your favorite bike brand has released a new gravel bike which would just be perfect for it... and before you know it, you have 10 bikes in your shed. The upside of the wide variety of choices is that you can personalize your setup in detail. The first thing, then, is to learn what you like and need.

Obviously, there are a few bikes to rule out for the journey described here. That ultralightweight racing bike of yours would most likely snap under the weight of heavily loaded panniers. Your favorite fixie that gets you around town and looks so good with your coat and scarf won't get you up steep climbs. Consider your riding posture, too: a sportive position might break your back in the long run and have you seeing fifty shades of tarmac instead of the wonders of the world. On the other hand, an upright position will be unbearable in a relentless headwind. You will probably end up somewhere in the middle. With good bike geometry, you can spend a long day in the saddle without too many aches. A handlebar that offers multiple riding positions prevents strain in wrists and shoulders, and a strong frame will easily carry you and your belongings. Mounting options for screwing on luggage racks or cages are also helpful. And you will want gears: the more the better. You will use "gran-y-gear" more often than you think, climbing those endless cordilleras.

Many long distance riders opt for steel frames, which are the strongest and easiest to work with. If a steel frame breaks on a back road in Iran, someone will be able to weld it together again in the next town. Steel is also flexible and absorbs some of the shocks and shakes, which makes



the ride more comfortable compared to stiffer materials like aluminium or carbon. The downside? Steel is by far the heaviest material. More and more, bikes are being made from aluminium or carbon, which are much lighter than steel. Aluminium frames are affordable, lightweight, and strong enough so that they rarely break. Ultralightweight carbon, previously only used for racing bikes, is getting stronger too, and is now also used for touring bikes. But you have to be more careful with a carbon frame when doing something like throwing your bike on top of a Landcruiser in Africa to escape a pride of lions. While carbon is very strong, it's difficult to repair when damaged. Finally, many brands are moving toward premium titanium frames. The material is lightweight, ultrastrong, and sleek, but you'll need a deep wallet.

I have toured extensively on my Surly Long Haul Trucker (LHT), a sturdy, classic touring bike. Standard 28-inch wheels, 35-millimeter tires, no-nonsense V-brakes, steel frame. Many extras that could break on a bike are not present on this one—it's the bare minimum, but all I've needed. I considered taking it on this trip as well, but on rocky or sandy roads, the thin tires have made the riding hard or even impossible, and I've often ended up pushing it on the roughest roads. So I looked into mountain bikes and fat bikes, both of which are capable of rougher terrain. The Surly ECR, a so-called "camp-bike," caught my attention.

Its tires, at 29 by 3 inches, had a lot more rubber than the LHT's, which would make dirt roads more butt-friendly and potentially keep me pedaling through sand. People advised against it, saying it would slow me down on pavement. After some test rides, I saw they had a point, but I felt a connection to the bike. It was so comfortable on dirt, I felt like it was inviting me to adventure. Besides, it wasn't my intention to be the fastest. I wanted to be comfortable and feel confident. Despite all the rational advice, at the end of the day, I just needed to feel good in the saddle. More than my bike, it was my mindset that would take me around the world.

<b>Bike:</b>	Surly ECR, Large
<b>Saddle:</b>	Gilles Berthoud Aravis, Titanium, Cork
<b>Tires:</b>	Surly Knard 29x3.0"
<b>Rims:</b>	Rabbit Hole 50 mm
<b>Brakes:</b>	Avid BB7, 180/160mm front & rear
<b>Brake Levers:</b>	Avid FR-5
<b>Shifters:</b>	SRAM NX Eagle
<b>Handlebar:</b>	17° aluminium bar
<b>Pedals:</b>	Race Face Chester, Red