



THE MAD MINUTE

with **NATHAN GRAY**

Lawyer and author of *First Pass Under Heaven*



After two years trekking the Great Wall of China and 4000km later, this author is happy to get a bit of down time promoting his book.

Q. What does your work involve?

A. I'm an author, now turned avid book seller, and when all this promotional madness calms down, a communications lawyer.

Q. What inspired you to write *First Pass Under Heaven*?

A. I had such a harrowing expedition, I was lucky to survive. Afterwards, I had so much to deal with emotionally and mentally to make sense of walking 4000km across mainland China that the experience just had to come out of me.

Q. How long did it take for you to finish it?

A. The walk: two years. The writing: three years, plus one more for the actual publishing process.

Q. What's the writing process like for you?

A. Writing is hard. One of the hardest, most disciplinary and solitudinal arts. Sometimes the words come, sometimes not – but you've got to be there, at the desk, to get them down. After walking 4000km I was pretty knackered so I was happy to sit at my desk for the next year. After that year I had to chain my feet to get it done.

Q. The dreaded writer's block, do you ever get it?

A. I have it now. That's why I'm excitedly running all over the world, free of my bonds, promoting my book.

Q. The one book that changed my life was . . . ?

A. Definitely *The Alchemist* (by Paulo Coelho). Straight after reading it I went off on an amazing five-month hitchhiking mission to the pyramids.

Q. What was your first job?

A. Working as a waiter for Government House. Spent my wage on the taxi ride home. Worth it to watch some of the country's biggest decisions being made around the table though.

Q. Favourite destination?

A. Alaska in the US, because nature totally rules, and humanity falls about third or fourth down the food chain.

Q. What's your proudest moment?

A. A three-way tie between my first push, taking six wickets and scoring the winning runs to take the National Secondary Schools Cricket title, and placing my hands on the very last brick of the 4000km-long Great Wall of China.

Q. Do you ever get paranoid that your story's been written before?

A. Everyone's story is unique so there is never going to be that fear. However if my twin brother or anyone else had gone and jumped the gun, I suppose I couldn't really complain. But just to get out there and inspire people, even if the messages are similar, is great.

Q. Are you working on your next novel?

A. After a four-year break from travelling I'm having another good look around the world to compare the changes (especially in China), and using the experience to write a book on the Mayan 2012 prophecies, and a determination on the future of humanity.