

So how scripted is it? "Years ago when I very first joined the BBC they wrote and said: 'Dear Sir, Will you please submit your script so that our legal department can vet

the power behind the throne are quite untrue: "Paul is definitely his own driving force," she says. As for the sleep, "I found it much, much harder in the earlier days".

close people get. The patter is only there because without the words, it's boring. "I'm from the north and that tends to give you an accent that's better for comedy.

the fair damsel who gets rescued by the knight. So she's the one that's seen in half, she's the one that's put in the box, she's the one who is impaled, he's the one that puts it

● The Magic Show with Paul 1 the Opera House, Cork, July 22 the Town Hall, Galway, July 29th

Cyclist finds a world full of friends

The lure of the Irish has Yasuyuki Ozeki cycling half way across the world, alone. He talks to Alva Mac Sherry from the plains of Russia

READERS of these pages may remember from last spring the story of a young Japanese man, Yasuyuki Ozeki, who was resolved to cycle from Japan to Ireland. And it will be no news to regular listeners to 2FM's *Gerry Ryan* show that Yasuyuki is, indeed, on his way.

He left on April 15th, and so far, he has cycled the whole way across China, through Mongolia, across the Gobi Desert, and across some great distance of the former Soviet Union. Now, he is heading for Moscow.

Every so often he stops to phone Ireland to talk to his sponsors, Bridgestone, to let them know he is still alive, or the *Gerry Ryan* show, or *The Irish Times*.

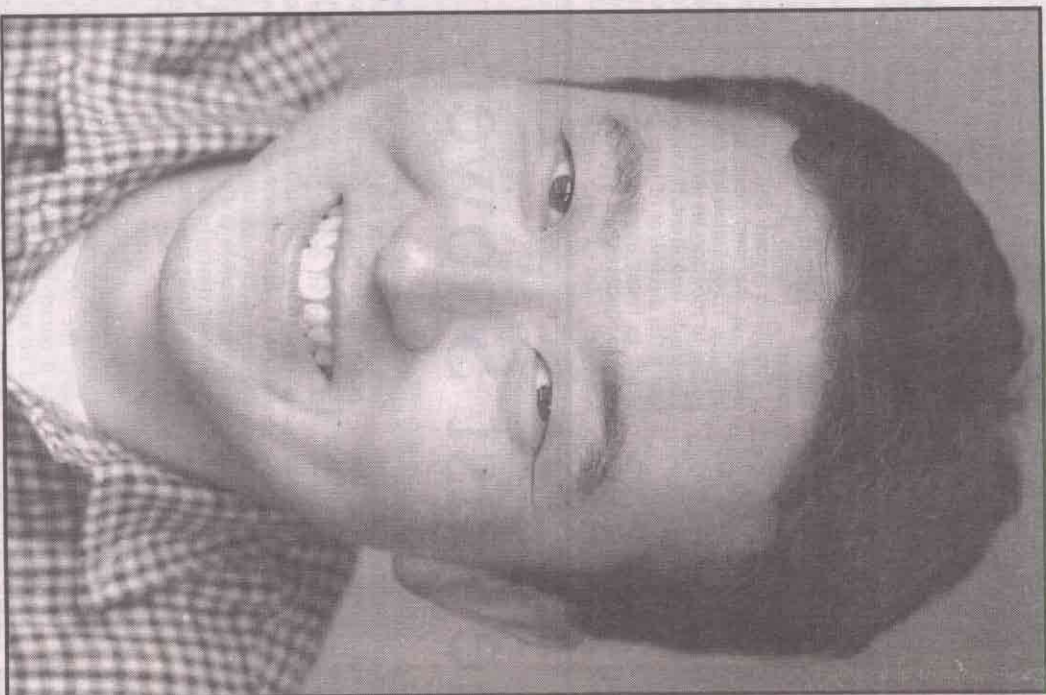
Strikingly quietest, and blessed with an infectious smile, Yasuyuki seems to be surviving by making his own luck — and lots of friends. In Ulan Bator, capital of Mongolia, he stayed with two volunteers from the Christina Noble foundation. When he turned up at the Irish embassy in Beijing he was introduced to Conor O'Clery, *The Irish Times's* China Correspondent; in Russia, he stayed with O'Clery's mother-in-law and when his bicycle broke some several hundred miles on, he got on a

train back to the city of "my Russian mother" to get it fixed; there, the man in the bicycle shop whipped a wheel off his own bike to get Yasuyuki back in the saddle again.

Sadly, Yasuyuki was robbed on the Trans-Siberian railway by a gang — the only time, he says, he has had trouble.

"It's much better than I expected," he says from the city of Novosibirsk, where he is staying with "a friend of a Russian friend from Japan". "I can't describe it in one word but I am experiencing many things every day. It's nice to see the world, to see Russian people, and to see a difference between countries. I am happy to know I am all right and I am getting closer to Ireland."

When we spoke he was setting off from Novosibirsk, heading for Moscow, and not expecting to meet anyone who knew of him — but this he finds not daunting at all: he expects to make friends "local people... they are so nice". There is no language barrier, he says. "I learn the language — every day I learn one word; today I learned three words." He describes how, when he stops at roadside cafés in villages and towns, people are surprised to see



Yasuyuki Ozeki: 'Every day I learn one word; today I learned three words.' Photograph: Frank Miller

a lone traveller. "They gesture, 'where is your partner?' and I say in Russian 'no, too much', they

gesture, 'don't you feel scared?' and I say the Russian word I know, for 'fine, fine'. Sometimes people in cars stop and ask where are you going to, and they say 'come to my house'. One car guided me 10 kilometres to his house and I stayed there and had great food and drink — of course

vodka, Russian vodka. "We don't need any words, we just need to open our hearts."

Crossing the Gobi desert, need- less to say, there were no inns, so Yasuyuki either put up his tent or, if there were any nearby, approached nomad families who invariably welcomed him with open arms. Not far into the desert, he ran out of asphalt, and ended up pushing the bike for 10 minutes

"They gesture 'don't you feel scared,' and I say the Russian word I know, for 'fine, fine'"

through the sand, resting for 10 minutes, pushing again, then resting again. Despite the physical strain, he says, he is in remarkably good condition.

"I feel very strong. Better than when I departed."

He is reluctant to name his favourite country so far, but "if I must choose, Mongolia was great. The people were just so nice — naturally nice. Nature there is just wild. One day I didn't see anyone at all, just horses." Yasuyuki is cycling about 100 kilometres a day.

His landmark of choice is Lake Baikal, the deepest lake in the world, which he reached at the end of May. "I can't describe it. It's deep, but it was mentally deep for me," he says.

"I exercised in Japan that I will feel tired of the long trip," he says, "but every day I have my goal — a short goal, a middle goal and a big goal. From here to the Urals is my small goal," (he should be reaching the Urals about the time you read this) "to Moscow is my middle goal, and my ultimate goal is O'Connell Street."

It is a journey remarkable for its ambition, and also for Yasuyuki himself. He came to Ireland some years ago and fell in love with the laid-back lifestyle. When he compared it with the highly-pressured, white-collar lifestyle that lay in wait for him at home in a typical Japanese company, he decided to "drop off the escalator" — a Japanese term for those few who delay the career convention.

His way of "dropping off", he decided, would be to undertake this monumental geographical journey; he hoped also to cross in his mind the great expanse of difference between the two cultures. Hopefully he can get here before the Celtic Tiger consumes the lifestyle he fell for.

Why won

THESES have been written about it. Speeches have been made world-wide about it, but still it remains a mystery: why don't more women run in elections? It's a question pertinent even when circumstances are highly favourable to women — even at UCDD, in a college where almost half the students are women and where women are highly active at various levels within the Student's Union, when it comes to the elections for the union's four top posts, women simply don't run.

Stranger still, the number of women candidates contesting the top jobs has gone down, not up, in recent years. In the 1980s and early 1990s there would be at least one woman, possibly more, among every year's four elected sabbatical or executive officers. Sabbatical officers take a year out of college while holding office. Yet in 1998, of the candidates who ran for the Students Union sabbatical offices, three of the four races — for president, welfare and education officers — were exclusively male.

Only in the election of an entertainments officer did a woman choose to contest an office, unsuccessfully. The result is that this year, like last year, all the elected officers are male.

It is a phenomenon that puzzles the outgoing Students' Union president, Ian Walsh, who has just finished his year-long term. "I can't really answer the question as to why women don't actually run," he says. "There is not much evidence to say that students don't vote for a female candidate," he says. "Since I have been in college I can think of a number of female candidates, some of them were elected, some weren't. The person who came across as the best candidate generally did win the election. I can't think of instances where I thought a female superior in terms of capabilities was beaten by a male who was obviously inferior."

A glance at the results of elections to the Students Council, its parliament, also knocks on the head the idea that women candidates in UCDD face discrimination. Mags

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