

SIMON NEIL HARBY (S78-81)

He was born in 1965 and after leaving the College did various jobs before becoming Business Development and Marketing Manager at Smithkline Beecham Clinical Laboratories from 1997 to 2001. He was then consulting manager for a couple of companies before deciding at the end of 2002 to take time out to motorcycled around the world with his wife. He did this to raise awareness for treatable blindness on a budget of just \$50 per day. In all they covered 70,000 miles and visited 24 countries.



He set off with his wife Suzi, an interior designer, on two motorcycles on 9 December 2002. The plan included catching the ferry to Cherbourg and heading down the west coast of France and the west side of Spain, taking the ferry across the Straits of Gibraltar to Ceuta, in North African. From there, they travelled on through Morocco and on to Mauritania, where he had a bad accident, hitting a donkey and smashing his motorbike. Now 'two-up' they continued to Dakar in Senegal with the one bike, later flying to Johannesburg, where they used much of their money buying a second-hand replacement.

From May to September 2003, they toured as much as possible of South Africa, before continuing to Mozambique, then up the African east coast from Tanzania via Uganda to Kenya, where they visited Mombassa, Malindi and Lamu, following the wheel-tracks of Chinese Admiral Zheng He in the 15th century!

In January 2004, they shipped the bikes from Mombassa to Bombay in India. From there, they headed down the Malabar Coast to Goa, Cochin in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. As the ferry in Rameswaram to Sri Lanka was out of service, they decided to explore the inland of the Indian Subcontinent. Heading to Madurai, Bangalore, Hampi, Poona and on to New Delhi.

It was in the Indian capital in April when they applied for visas at the embassy of the Union of Myanmar. These applications, including a special route permit, took two months to process, so while waiting they explored the Himalayas. Picture was taken at the top of Kunzum Pass, Himachal, Northern India.



They finally received their route permit on 17 June. At the Myanmar border post of Tamu, another handwritten travel permit was issued to them stating all their important stages on their route within Myanmar. They followed the new UN-ESCAP projected Asian Highway through Kalewa, where is a new bridge across the Chindwin River, to Monywa, Sagaing and across the Irrawaddy River to Mandalay. They were harassed by the police for not staying at local guesthouses and were told to spend their money like bona fide tourists.



After staying in Mandalay for a week, they left to ride to the pagoda studded Bagan, passed Mount Popa in the monsoon rain and ended up in Kalaw on the Shan Plateau. On July 15, full of expectation, they departed to Taunggyi, the capital of Shan State, and continued by road to Kengtung and further down to the border town of Tachilek.



It was at this stage that red tape ensnared them. After having passed all the roadblocks for 30 kilometers after Taunggyi, they were stopped by military personnel and escorted back to Taunggyi. There, it was made clear that they had to fly to Kengtung but send their motorbikes by truck.

As all the Wa driven trucks from Taunggyi to Kengtung have to travel in convoy, so the English couple waited for six days at Inle Lake before boarding the plane to Kengtung at Heho Airport.

They finally arrived in Kengtung, and stayed in Harry's Guesthouse to wait for the truck convoy to arrive. Days went by and they had to overstay their visas by three days until the convoy arrived and they could then ride to Tachilek.

On July 28, they exhaustedly crossed into the border town of Mae Sai in Thailand. The whole operation had set them back financially \$400.

Despite the problems in Myanmar, they completed their amazing world tour via Laos, Cambodia, Bangkok, Malay Peninsula, Australia, Central America, U.S.A. and finally back to London in April 2005. During the trip, they raised funds and awareness for the charity ORBIS UK. (ORBIS is an international development organisation that works to eliminate avoidable blindness in developing countries where at least 90 percent of the blind and visually impaired reside).

After returning he came Marketing and Business Development Manager for BUPA and is currently Hospital Marketing & Business Manager at the Cadogan Clinic where he works in a new-build private day-hospital in Sloane Street.

In addition to his travels and professional career he has also worked as a professional yacht skipper and has completed two Fastnet races, in 2001 and 2007, coming 6th and 4th in class one. He has come 36th in the 2004 Sydney to Hobart yacht race. In the 2009 Fastnet race he will be running a syndicated yacht.

On 1 December 2008 he gave a lecture at the Royal Geographic Society on his round the world trip. Here is James Ruddock-Broyd's write up :-

ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY MEMBERS LECTURE – 1 DECEMBER 2008

360 DEGREES BY MOTORBIKE AND A BIT MORE.....

by Simon and Suzi Harby (OF Garrett House 1977-82)

Head note in RGS brochure: Simon and Suzi tell of their trials and tribulations during their two years travelling through Africa, Asia, Australia and America by motorbike. After a few ups and downs they achieved their goal!

The Ondaatje Theatre was full. Simon is a Fellow and regularly attends meetings. The expedition had taken place approx 2003 to 2005. Both Harbys are from Norfolk. It is thought this may be the first time an OF has given a lecture at the RGS.

After Minute reading the President, Prof Sir Gordon Conway KCMG FRS introduced the Harbys very amusingly and commented on the large number of friends attending – the largest he had ever seen. This is obviously the reason why JGRB had no approaches from OFs for tickets following the notice on the OF web site!

The lecture was shared with a little more than half being presented by Simon. Both were extremely professional in their presentations; no beating about the bush; they stuck to the nitty gritty of their story. It was not possible to get down many notes as the theatre was in darkness most of the time but the couple gave an enthralling presentation which held the audience spellbound: light guffaws and exclamations abounded round the room throughout the evening.

The majority of the lecture was about riding through Morocco, Africa, India, Burma, Thailand and Indonesia. They covered rather more than the circumference of the world - some 60,000 miles. Half a dozen short videos were included; the President apologised for the poor quality (like the mirage when going at speed in the desert) - the practice run had been perfectly alright.

Simon was inspired by Peter Ustinov. In the Tagant Desert, near the boarder of Mali, Simon hit a donkey at speed which was their only casualty so he had to go to Johannesburg to get a new machine; they used three bikes on the

trip and their current two were parked outside the RGS entrance. Petrol prices ranged from 11p per litre in Indonesia to 95p in the UK.

In India they landed at Mumbai and went south then up the middle to Delhi. The thing most to be avoided there is Tata trucks; they saw numerous accidents including one stopping so short the body left the chassis. One scary bit 60 kms south of Srinagar in Kashmir was an explosion ahead in traffic and no sign of Suzi behind for some time. It turned out a Muslim shopkeeper had given her shelter. Simon recalled the British leaving India - "The most they lost was not India, it was the Himalayas" - 'they are just wonderful'.

Passes had to be obtained for several countries - one occasion meant waiting three months for the Burma one

At question time there was a steady stream, most centring on the human and personal side of the expedition. In answer to the first question, the preferred place for Simon to revisit was the Himalayas and for Suzi it was Namibia; "It is full of variety and just so beautiful."

The bikes carried reserve fuel tanks for up to 600km range. Suzi's bike practice consisted of riding 2,000 miles on a trip to Scotland.

Straight after the lecture, I managed to have a brief word with Simon who said there is part of story on the OF Website and he is talking to the College on 13 March; in a second chat I gave good wishes from Brian Rosen (S40-46) who had been a 'bikey' for 50 years and would have loved to be there but he lives near Lyon.

I then waited 15 minutes and managed to get a cancellation of a dinner place; they are only held after Monday member nights. By pure chance I was seated on the table with Simon's sister, Fiona, who went to St Felix and had lots of boyfriends from Fram Coll. Her husband Philip is an architect and they live in the Close at Norwich Cathedral and their daughter Kate is awaiting to hear if she has a place at Norwich School for Sixth Form. It was thought Simon's best friend from Fram was unable to be there as he has a young family. A friend, Nigel, had been a great support for the whole expedition and sent a replacement rear shock absorber to Delhi and a chum in Delhi couriered it to Baspa Valley on the Tibetan/Nepalese boarder.

He (and I believe his wife Suzi) will be speaking at the College Geographical Society meeting on Tuesday 10th March 2009, in the HPT at 6.45 p.m. The title given is '**360° by Motorbike – Bringing Maps to Life**'. Any OFs are very welcome to attend.