

Long Way Down: An Epic Journey by Motorcycle from Scotland to South Africa

By Ewan McGregor, Charley Boorman

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After their fantastic trip round the world in 2004, fellow actors and bike fanatics Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman couldn't shake the travel bug. And after an inspirational UNICEF visit to Africa, they knew they had to go back and experience this extraordinary continent in more depth. And so they set off on their 15,000-mile adventure, experiencing some of the toughest terrain in the world - and meeting some of the friendliest people.
Containing over one hundred exclusive photographs - including some taken by Ewan and Charley, and many more by internationally renowned photographer Julian Broad - this beautifully illustrated edition vividly documents a trip of a lifetime.

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Editorial Review

Review
A great book?**BELLA**

About the Author
Ewan McGregor was born in Perthshire in 1971. An actor who has appeared in more than thirty films -- *Trainspotting, Velvet Goldmine, Moulin Rouge,* and the second *Star Wars* trilogy among them -- he rides an MV Augusta F4S and a KTM Duke. He lives in London with his wife and two daughters.

Charley Boorman was born in England, grew up in Ireland, and currently lives in London with his family. An actor whose first starring role was in *Deliverance,* he met his costar Ewan while shooting *The Serpent's Kiss.* He rides a Ducati 748 and is preparing for the2006 Paris -- Dakar rally, if his wife lets him

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Where's Charley?

CHARLEY: I remember the moment it started. It was October 2004, very late one Friday night. We were in the old office in Bulwer Street with boxes all around us, bits of paper, all the office equipment gone. For a few minutes we just stood there reflecting. This is where Long Way Round had all begun, where we'd planned everything, checked and re-checked the maps: it's where we'd first seen the bikes.

It was over, finished: we'd ridden around the world, a mammoth journey; an epic adventure. But it was over now.

The maps were still on the wall and we stood before them once more. Ewan glanced at me.

'What do you reckon, Charley?'

'I don't know.'

'South America, India maybe?'

I looked up at him. 'What about riding through Africa?'

Ewan and I first met on a film set in County Clare more than a dozen years ago, our friendship born out of our passion for motorbikes. We've been best mates ever since. We'd always talked about riding together; France maybe, Spain. But then Ewan walked into a map shop, and over dinner that night we decided to forget France or Spain, we'd go the whole hog and ride around the world. The adventure of a lifetime, the two of us off on a couple of bikes. I wasn't sure we could pull it off; I wasn't sure it would even happen.

But it did. A late-night conversation became a dream, the dream became an adventure and that adventure proved to be a pivotal point in my life.

I grew up in the movie business, but I'm dyslexic...and I mean badly: if it hadn't been for my dad taking a year out to teach me to read, life could've been very hard. Even so, reading for acting parts could be difficult

sometimes. Historically I'd enjoyed success in movies like *The Emerald Forest*, but after *Long Way Round* the direction of my life altered completely. I found myself in places like the pit lane of Moto GP circuits with heroes like Kenny Roberts grabbing my arm and telling me how much he'd enjoyed watching our journey.

I was no longer just John Boorman's son - in fact my dad rang me up the other day to tell me he'd introduced himself to someone and they'd said, 'Oh, Charley Boorman's dad'.

My career was now in motorcycling - albeit not in a conventional way - and the success of *Long Way Round* enabled me to live another dream. Ever since I can remember I'd always wanted to race bikes, so together with Russ Malkin, a very good friend and producer/director of *Long Way Round*, I entered the world's most dangerous race: the 2006 Dakar rally - five days in January where I rode ridiculous distances at ridiculous speeds before an innocuous crash tipped me off and I broke both my hands. (I never made it to the sand dunes and I've unfinished business there.) That dream was over for now, but another was just beginning.

Ewan flew in for the end of the Dakar to congratulate us all (my fellow teammate Simon Pavey had made it all the way to the finishing line). He was joined by film maker David Alexanian, the fourth member of the team that created *Long Way Round*. There we were in Dakar - all together again. And there in the scorching sun we confirmed what we had first mapped out over a year before in Bulwer Street. The adventure was on again - John O'Groats to Cape Town: we would ride the Long Way Down.

Once my hands were healed, the first thing Ewan and I did was return to the Royal Geographical Society in London, the place where we'd mapped out the first trip. Our bikes parked outside, I took my helmet off. The old red brick building seemed very familiar.

'So here we are again, Ewan. What do we say to them this time?'

He laughed. 'How about: Hi, remember us? We're back for more.'

Inside I quickly recalled how solemn the place felt; the arched windows, blue carpets and the magnificent ancient maps that decked the walls. One in particular dated from 1920 and at the bottom it was engraved with images of the old continent, names and places going back to colonial days when just about every European country fought for a share of the spoils. Ewan pointed to a picture of a guy in a pith helmet in a pretty compromising position with a tribesman. 'Hey, Charley,' he said. 'Here's how you made friends with the natives back then. See, you grabbed a man by his willy.'

In the journey-planning office we met the same assistant we'd spoken to before and she had yet more large-scale maps spread on a mahogany table.

'Have you decided on a route?' she asked us.

I shook my head. 'Nothing definite yet, but we're going to ride down through Europe, I think, probably cross from Sicily.'

'We'd like to follow the Nile,' Ewan added. 'It's one of those journeys, you know; one of the great trips of the world.'

She nodded. 'Sudan is pretty unstable and so are parts of Ethiopia. You'll need to be up on your paperwork.'

I rolled my eyes. 'Jesus, paperwork. The Ukraine, Ewan. Remember?'

'You mean when we waited nine hours to get in - how could I possibly forget?'

'Ethiopia is absolutely beautiful though,' the assistant went on, 'and despite the problems they're really trying to build up tourism. Sudan is full of open spaces, the Africa of the movies, if you like.' She smiled then, a little warily. 'There are security issues, however.'

I cast a glance at Ewan. She was right, as we knew only too well. We'd only just started investigating the route and already knew we'd need armed guards to get us through places like northern Kenya. We were thinking about going into the Democratic Republic of Congo, and weren't sure whether we'd have to go through Zimbabwe. This was going to be a very different journey from Long Way Round, and I think we were only just beginning to realise how different.

Having reacquainted ourselves with the Royal Geographical Society we headed for the wilds of Devon and a weekend's survival course. The weather was shit, a cold, drizzling rain, and to make things even more miserable, Ewan had his tent up before me. He was crowing about it. I mean, he never gets his tent up before me. It was galling. There was some consolation however: he'd put it up at the bottom of a hill and it was raining, which meant there was every chance he'd have a river running through it before long.

After that, we got lost in the 'wild wood' whilst hunting for strategically placed survival rations, and then we had to build shelters from fallen branches and bits of foliage.

Not that we're competitive or anything, but my A-frame and ridge was up, the sides constructed and I was already onto the roof whilst Ewan was still going on about a 'long ridge pole' and the 'bell end' being big enough. After making a wall of branch and fern, the last layer was leaves. Lying inside I could still see daylight and my feet stuck out, though I only discovered that when the instructor kicked them. He proceeded to tell us about a friend of his who went to sleep with his head sticking out of a similar shelter in Africa, only to be woken by a hyena ripping off his face. Our instructor liked telling those kinds of stories: he liked to tell them a lot.

He was complimentary about my shelter, however, testing thestructural quality by climbing right over it while I was lying inside. In his own words, it didn't budge an inch.

Ewan was arranging leaves and ferns and other bits and pieces; like a boy scout he was, having a whale of a time. 'Colour coding confuses your enemy,' I heard him mutter.

Finally he was finished, the branches covered with sprays of fern and leaf. He was stretched out inside and the instructor asked him if he felt confident that it was structurally sound.

Ewan replied that he did.

'Good,' the instructor said, 'because I'm going to walk on it.'

He'd barely shifted his weight when the 'bell end' Ewan had been so proud of collapsed, showering our Jedi Knight in broken branches.

For a moment there was silence. Then from the depths we heard him: 'Yeah, well, I think obviously there's room for improvement. But generally...' We could see his hands, gesticulating from under the crushed ridge. 'I was quite happy with its...you know, I liked the feel of it and it smelled really nice.'

On cue and not without a certain sense of ceremony, the rest of the shelter collapsed; a few moments later Ewan emerged: half a beard, his woollen hat askew.

'Shame,' he said. 'I put a lot of love into that.'

EWAN: What Charley didn't mention was that his A-frame was put together by the instructor. That's why it was so solid. I did mine myself. Not quite the same thing, is it?

The instructor really did like his tales of horror: hyenas eating people; elephants trampling our campsite; not to mention the machete-wielding madmen lurking outside every bar. Having said that, he also told us that despite our laid-back attitude, I was 'wily' and Charley was really 'industrious'.

From Devon, hyenas and elephants, it was Essex and a replica of the border between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda. Driving down a track in a 4x4 we had the feeling we were about to be ambushed. We were right - just as we were considering potential escape routes a mine exploded in front of the truck.

David Alexanian, who would be joining us on the real trip, was driving. He immediately started backing up. More flash bangs went off, mines, or grenades maybe, exploding behind us.

Now we heard the rattle of gunfire and a man appeared on our right. Heavily built, he approached the vehicle at a crouch, wearing camouflage and carrying an AK-47. We dived for the doors on the passenger side only to find another guy bellowing at us and brandishing not a gun, but a couple of vicious-looking axes.

We piled out of the vehicle. Hands in the air, we tried to talk to the gunmen - a whole gang of them now. We tried to explain about UNICEF, and what we were doing. They weren't listening or didn't understand: they didn't care. Before we knew it we were forced away from the vehicles, our captors demanding money, jackets, our watches.

We'd discussed such a situation with our instructors and they had advised us that in really dangerous areas, convoys of vehicles were put together under armed guard. Our trip was high profile ...

Users Review

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Leona Hicks:

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