

easy rider

CHARLEY BOORMAN captured the world's imagination last year when he and Ewan McGregor rode their motorbikes from John o'Groats to Cape Town. But, as we found out, this adventurer's journey is only just beginning...

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Charley Boorman picks up the phone. "Can I call you back in half an hour?" he asks. "I'm just having a coffee with my dad and we don't get the chance very often."

Charley's dad is film director John Boorman, of *Deliverance* (1972), *Excalibur* (1981) and *The Emerald Forest* (1985) fame. With movies in his blood, going into the film business was a natural step for Charley, and he acted in all of the above films and, more recently, *The Bunker*. But the fact that father and son don't get enough time together at the moment is due to Charley's new passion – for adventure. He has spent much of the last four years on the road with best pal and Hollywood star, Ewan McGregor.

The two met in 1997 on the set of *The Serpent's Kiss* and, bonded by their love of motorbikes, instantly hit it off. Fuelled by that shared interest, as well as a desire to travel and help disadvantaged children, last year Charley and Ewan embarked on a gruelling journey from the north of Scotland to the southern tip of Africa, crossing some of the most troubled countries on earth. Documented in a hit TV series, *Long Way Down*, and a best-selling book of the same name, the trip was a test of their stamina – and friendship.

On the way, Charley and Ewan rode their BMW R1200 GS Adventure bikes across mud, sand, grass and just about every other kind of

terrain. Their bikes took them 15,000 miles across two continents, a journey punctuated by several wheelies by Charley – much to the delight of the children they passed.

He says fondly, "I've always loved wheelies. The guy who got me into motorbikes when I was nine years old used to do stonking wheelies across the fields. I thought, 'That's what I want to do! I don't want to learn how to read, I don't want to learn how to write, I just want to learn how to do wheelies!'"

Highlights of Charley and Ewan's travels include unforgettable experiences such as nearly being trampled by an elephant, seeing wild gorillas in Rwanda, and falling deeply in love with Ethiopia.

BELOW: EWAN AND CHARLEY VISIT ROBIN HOUSE AT THE START OF LONG WAY DOWN; OPPOSITE TOP: EWAN AND CHARLEY ON THEIR FIRST TRIP, LONG WAY ROUND



"It's an amazing country. It was like going back 300 years," says Charley.

And these weren't the only high points. "There were lots of drop-dead, slap-in-the-face moments. I remember being in Tanzania – that's real Africa, the Africa you imagine in your head. It was nearly sunset, and I stopped at the top of a hill, and Ewan pulled up beside me. The sky was starting to go orange, and in the distance we could see some zebra. I looked at it all and started laughing. Ewan said, 'What are you laughing at?' I said, 'We rode here!'"

The long and winding road

But inevitably there were moments when Ewan and Charley fell out. "There were days that weren't as good as others," says Charley. "It's all about talking. If something's annoying you, then you've got to talk about it and not let it build up inside.

"The bad moments are when you're tired. It's three or four o'clock in the afternoon, you're knackered, the road is hard, and you're in a bad mood. The bike in front is annoying you because it's kicking out lots of dust, so you start grumbling and mumbling into your helmet. But then you stop, eat a cereal bar and start laughing again."

And being away from home comforts for such a long time took its toll. Charley's philosophy is to "think Gucci" when roughing it. "The one thing you want to be is

comfortable at night," he says. "I used to sometimes daydream about being in my tent, because it had a lovely sleeping bag."

Some of the saddest moments of the trip were when Ewan and Charley visited places affected by violence and genocide. "We stumbled across a village in northern Kenya where 27 children had been killed in their school. And you think, 'How can someone do that?' The problem is that these things happen all over the world, and we seem to keep making the same mistakes again and again. I don't understand human nature."

All in a good cause

Impressively, Long Way Down raised more than £550,000 for UNICEF, Riders for Health, >



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CHAS: HELP AT HAND



PHOTO: PAUL HAMPTON

LINDA, ONE OF THE CARE TEAM AT ROBIN HOUSE, HAS FUN WITH THE CHILDREN

The Children's Hospice Association Scotland (CHAS) is a charity that provides hospice services for children with terminal conditions. It runs two hospices: Rachel House – Scotland's first children's hospice – in Kinross, and Robin House in Balloch, which opened in 2005. Each hospice provides support for up to 200 families every year. Although CHAS services are free, each year it costs the charity almost £5m to run the hospices.

To find out more about CHAS, call 0131 444 1900 or visit www.chas.org.uk



and the Children's Hospice Association Scotland (CHAS). Ewan is a UNICEF Ambassador, and Charley has also been a key campaigner for the organisation since Long Way Round, Ewan and Charley's first big trip together in 2004. Ewan is also a patron of CHAS and over the years has raised well over £10 million for the charity, which has helped it build Robin House, a hospice for terminally-ill children in Balloch, overlooking Loch Lomond. Charley and Ewan visited Robin House at the start of Long Way Down.

"My involvement with CHAS started because of Ewan," says Charley. "I lost my sister to cancer, so I understood what it was like to lose someone, but to lose a child? I don't know how people cope. What's beautiful with CHAS is that they offer people the chance to build memories with that child."

"I remember when my sister was dying, my first daughter had just been born, and I was very lucky that she met my firstborn. She only held her once, but then sadly slipped away. I know how important it was to me for my child

LONG WAY ROUND LTD



AT THE END OF LONG WAY DOWN, CHARLEY AND EWAN AUCTIONED OFF THEIR GEAR FOR CHARITY

"I KNEW WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO LOSE SOMEONE, BUT A CHILD? I DON'T KNOW HOW PEOPLE COPE"

to have that contact with my sister, even though it was only for a few moments. When I got involved with Robin House those feelings were very strong for me, so I understood completely how the parents felt."

At the moment, there are only two CHAS hospices, and Charley would love to see more open. "Robin House has been built with real care and attention to what the kids need," he says. "But far beyond the setting of the place are the people who work there. They are just incredible. It must be so hard to see children slipping away all the time and helping to deal with the parents, but when you're there, it doesn't feel depressing, it feels uplifting... There's a really positive, electric buzz about the place."

It's clear that Charley and Ewan genuinely empathise with the people they encounter, and Charley puts this down to being a parent – he has two daughters by his wife, Olivia. "When you have children, things change a little bit," he says. "I suppose you stop thinking about yourself as much and start thinking about your children."

After Long Way Round, Charley competed in the Dakar Rally, and he reveals that he is hoping to do another solo journey soon.

"I'm trying to get a TV project together for myself at the moment, which will involve some travelling and a bit of madness," he says. "I'm looking for more adrenalin and more fun. I've got something planned, but we're in negotiations at the moment."

Since Ewan and Charley completed Long Way Down, there has been much talk of the pair doing a follow-up. Of course, 2008 has seen even more violence in Kenya, and Ewan and Charley are keen to raise more money. One idea was Long Way Up – a trip from South America to Alaska. However, both men are keen to continue their work for UNICEF and have mentioned a fundraising project called Long Way To Go – focusing on the Aids epidemic in Africa.

It seems the journey is far from over.

JOURNEY'S END: CHARLEY AND EWAN REACH CAPE TOWN – THE LAST STOP ON THEIR LONG WAY DOWN TRIP

