

London to Mount Everest 2019

This is the story of the epic adventure undertaken by Tom Mouse and Dicky Barr, who rode their motorcycle from London to Mount Everest in Tibet. They travelled over 10,000 miles, through 19 countries, in two and a half months; raising funds for the Down's Syndrome Association and for Woolgrove School, Special Needs Academy in the United Kingdom.



The route Tom Mouse had planned from the UK was through France, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, across the Caspian Sea (by ferry!) to Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and China; arriving at Mount Everest base camp in Tibet!

Chapter 1 ... Ready, Steady, Go!

... Tom Mouse gazed out of the window of his beautiful hotel across the historic city of Ulm on the river Danube. He reflected on the last few days; the great send off from the Ace Cafe in London; riding to and staying in the Champagne capital Reims with its vibrant cafe culture; meeting the others on the motorcycle adventure that he was starting to get to know. "Hey Dicky", said Tom Mouse, "I doubt we will be in such luxurious accommodation this time next month".



Tom Mouse felt that their adventure was thoroughly underway now, with the days spinning past as he, Dicky and the other adventure motorcyclists sped down through Europe.

They travelled from Ulm through the Bavarian countryside, by passing Munich and over the border into Austria with its spectacular snow-capped mountains, and on to the shores of Lake Bled in Slovenia. It was rain jackets on for the following morning as they headed into Croatia, the 5th county in as many days. They all were glad to eventually see the sun and the seemingly endless and beautiful Adriatic coast of Croatia.



Tom Mouse was becoming a little concerned that Dicky hadn't changed his socks in more than 4 days; he made a mental note to raise this with Dicky in the morning ...



... Tom Mouse had chuckled when Dicky had said that probably everyone on the adventure was searching for something. Tom Mouse said that he was glad that Dicky had at least found clean socks. Tom Mouse, Dicky and the other adventure motorcyclists continued on their fantastic journey.

They left behind them the wealth and beauty of Dubrovnik and the Croatian coast, travelled briefly through Bosnia & Herzegovina and Montenegro, a transition both geographically and economically, in to Albania.

Albania's capital, Tirana was manic with traffic from trucks to cars to horses; and with little or no rules or at least few were being adhered to. Tirana appeared to be the "jet wash" capital of the world, with businesses seemingly every few hundred yards. They don't just clean cars, they mainly clean money, they were told.

Tom Mouse was a wee bit concerned at first when a large new BMW car with blacked out windows pulled up alongside them in the traffic. The driver's window slid down to reveal a man with gleaming white teeth and a watch bigger than Tom Mouse's head. The man said beaming, "welcome to Albania!" It turned out that this Albanian lived in Milton Keynes in the U.K. He seemed very nice but Dicky and Tom Mouse speculated afterwards about just what was his line of business: Tom Mouse noted that his car was very clean.

Leaving behind the energy of Tirana, the adventurers stayed by the shores of Lake Orhid, which was a great deal better than it sounded, it was beautiful and gave hints as to what Albania could be as it develops tourism.



The excitement and the questions surrounding Albania faded as the adventurers made their 9th border crossing and headed off into Greece. The most amazing site so far for the adventurers was to be found at Meteora, with its six large monasteries perched precariously on the peaks of huge rock formations.

They moved on, twisting through tight roads with stunning scenery, past beautiful mountains and Mount Olympus itself, as they edged further eastward ...

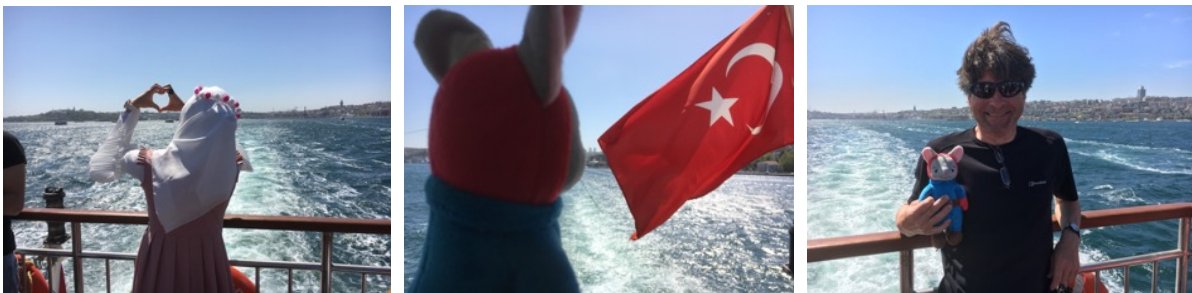


Chapter 2 ... Goodbye Europe, Hello Asia!

It was early in the morning when Tom Mouse, Dicky and the other adventure motorcyclists crossed the border into Turkey from Greece. They had arrived early to avoid the increasing queues, and everyone along with their motorcycles was processed and through within an hour. Tom Mouse spent much of his time on the bike, as usual in the tank bag of Dicky's bike. Tom Mouse liked sleeping on the motorcycle, the motion of the bike felt comforting to him and could produce wonderful dreams as he floated in and out of sleep. Fellow motorcycle adventurers, Pam and Len, also rode two up on their motorcycle; and Pam did tell Tom Mouse that she too occasionally liked to sleep on the back of their motorcycle as Len piloted them to their next destination.



Turkey almost immediately felt different to the quiet and rural Greece they had left behind. Turkey felt vibrant and ambitious: This feeling was amplified hugely when the group entered Istanbul, a city of over 15 million people, and a fair few mosques, which straddles the beautiful and commanding river Bosphorous, bridging Europe to Asia.

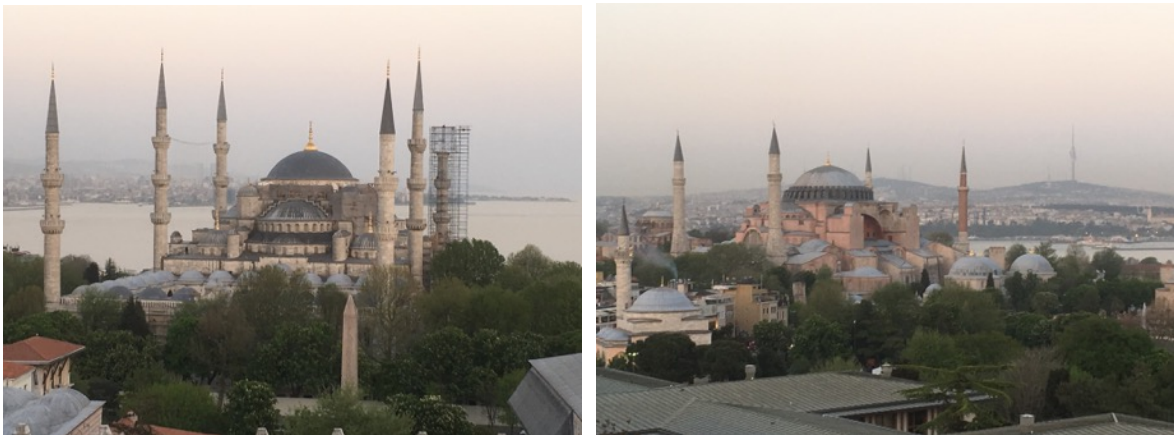


Tom Mouse loved the boat trip that he took with Dicky, where there was a huge mix of people and everyone was clearly enjoying themselves. After the boat trip the adventurers walked wide eyed, sniffing the air, through the Egyptian Spice Market. Tom did spend quite some time gazing at a cheese counter and eventually had to be enticed away.



The wealth of history and buildings in Istanbul, including the stunning Blue Mosque and the Hagia Sophia, (which goes back to the 6th century), is wonderful. What captured Dicky and Tom Mouse the most, however, was the frequent "call to prayer". Five times a day the city would be alive with the call from hundreds of mosques. They found the call to prayer to be an emotional mix; to be somewhat haunting, moving, soothing, conjuring ancient images and cultures largely unchanged through hundreds of years. Tom Mouse surprised himself, he looked forward to hearing the next call to prayer, even if it would be at 4.30 in the morning!

The adventurers moved on as they headed further east and into Asia!



Tom Mouse was fascinated by what he called, "Pete's ice cream van", although Pete was to explain that it was the "support vehicle" for the adventure motorcyclists and contained essentials such as camping equipment, tyres, oil, spare parts, air(!), several bottles of single malt fuel additive, and a hair trimmer! ... Tom Mouse thought this was a wonderful selection of items to take on an adventure. Mention of the hair trimmer made Tom Mouse chuckle as he thought about Dicky's recent two haircuts; he thought that Pete wouldn't just tinker about when wielding the trimmers! Tom Mouse's main interest however was in what might be the main ice cream options... He made a note to investigate further...



... the intrepid motorcycle adventurers reached the border between Turkey and Georgia, and Dicky and Tom Mouse reflected upon their journey across the spectacular vastness of central and eastern Turkey; a very young country but with an ancient, at times very turbulent, and significant past. The beautiful snow-capped mountains always seemed visible on their route which took them within 100 miles of Iraq and Iran ... they stayed in the ancient town and world heritage site of Safranbolu with its simple and beautiful mosques. they cooled in stunning caves at Cappadocia, and watched captivated the Whirling Dervishes Ceremony at a former caravanserai. ... they rested in the vibrant city of Malatya, some 65 miles from the Syrian border ... and relaxed further in the ski resort of Erzurum, which like so many other Turkish cities, hosted a large and thriving university. ... and then on to Kars, an ancient market town close to the borders with both Georgia and Armenia.



... a feature of road travel across Turkey is speed traps and coming across police and military check points. East of Istanbul, Tom Mouse and Dicky were stopped 3 times!

The first time, Dicky had stopped his motorcycle at the side of the road to put on his sun glasses. Two traffic police cars, blue and red lights flashing, pulled up and 4 police officers advanced towards the motorcycles ... it turned out that they were very friendly and only wanted to chat briefly and to take photographs of themselves with the adventurers and their motorcycles. Dicky took a selfie with two of the officers. Tom Mouse thought that this might have been a different situation altogether had they been the "fashion police", as he looked at Dicky who was wearing his new haircut and his aviator sun specs...

... another police stop became a minor photo shoot for Tom Mouse. Dicky (with Tom Mouse) and Kruse were stopped and after the usual passport check, Dicky produced Tom Mouse from his tank bag and with the bemused agreement and involvement of the armed police, a series of photographs was taken ...

... in a further encounter Dicky (& Tom Mouse) were last in a group of 4 motorcycles. A mobile radar trap led to all four being stopped. After some discussion amongst the police officers, reviewing their taped evidence, fines were then only given to the first two riders! The traffic officers' decision did appear on the face of it to carry some nationality bias... the police officers, with some delight, were then keen to have their photographs taken with their thumbs up as they administered the penalty notices. Job satisfaction in the Turkish Traffic Police would appear to be high ...

Later that evening Tom Mouse slumped into a deep sleep, and dreamed about dozens of mice, Scottish Highland dancing, with beaming Turkish Traffic Police officers whirling like dervishes ... zzz

The caravan of adventure motorcyclists carried on east and into Georgia ...



... it took over 4 hours for the adventure motorcyclists to get through border control from Turkey into Georgia. There was not a large amount of traffic, rather the immigration process was slow and at times not at all evident. Tom Mouse (who has diplomatic immunity) snoozed in the tank bag on Dicky's bike.

The approach to Georgia was beautiful and spectacular with a sweeping ribbon of tarmac high up in the mountains, and snow still piled up at the sides of the road - a few weeks earlier and the route would not have been so straight forward.

Into Georgia, the beauty of the route continued, however the pothole count increased significantly, some of the Georgians' driving was also a bit erratic, and the adventure motorcyclists had to take great care. Evidence of Georgia's recent Soviet heritage was on show with gas pipe networks running above ground in many of the towns and there were also austere and depressing blocks of flats.

The group visited Joseph Stalin's birthplace and museum, (which included his house and his railway carriage!), in the town of Gori. There still appeared, amongst some, to be huge respect for this powerful figure even given the terror and tragedy much of his regime created.



Tbilisi, Georgia's capital did, in its centre at least, provide a contrast with a mix of modern and old architecture. Tbilisi, as well as flying their St George's Cross related flag had hundreds of European Union flags raised, illustrating their ongoing efforts to obtain full membership of the EU.

In the same way that the Renault 12 seemed to be the most popular car in Turkey, it was the Lada that came out top in Georgia, in a variety of models and conditions, some capable of great speed with a determined Georgian driver ...! (... Lada 4x4 displayed by lead guide, Dom)





... Tom Mouse and Dicky thoroughly enjoyed their bus tour around Tbilisi, and a walk through the botanical gardens, as the temperature rose into the high 20s.

The following day the adventure motorcyclists travelled through rain and reached the border with Azerbaijan - and a sign which read "Azerbaijan Border - Good Luck".

It turned out to be a surprise and a great pleasure going through the Azerbaijan border, with friendly officials and a relatively smooth process, the group were quickly through.

Azerbaijan felt different again to Georgia, initially with a number of painted statues and some castellated buildings which would not have looked out of place in a Disney film. Later, as the group headed down to Baku, the capital, the countryside changed suddenly to a more parched, brown and barren landscape, leaving behind the trees, green fields, snowy mountains and the rivers.

In Baku, Tom Mouse, Dicky and the other adventure motorcyclists said sad goodbyes to the wonderful Julia. Julia, along with husband Kevin are the intrepid duo at the core of GlobeBusters. Julia was returning to their HQ in the United Kingdom and to prepare for a forthcoming adventure to Africa! ... Tom Mouse thought that a trip to Africa, to meet elephants, which were after all just very big mice (albeit with very long noses), would be fabulous. He made a note to give this more thought...



Baku, like any large developing city, was busy and alive. The adventure motorcyclists headed on rapidly towards a local port - there was news that they may be able to get on a ship that evening to cross the Caspian Sea!

Chapter 3 ... ALL At Sea - Welcome to a Different World

Day 24 ... the ferry left Baku, on the Caspian Sea, not to any apparent schedule but rather when it was ready, at midnight. The ferry had some 20 or so lorries on board and along with all of the motorcycles the cargo area was full to capacity. A few of the adventure motorcyclists got cabins, but for most it was a case of laying sleeping bags on the floor and dozing to the soothing and thrumming rhythm of the boat's engines as it rolled gently on a smooth sea.



The boat arrived off Turkmenistan late in the morning, however docking took a considerable amount of time into an immaculate new port, where the terminal was faced with what appeared to be gleaming white marble - (a feature of many of the buildings in the gas rich Turkmenistan). A convoluted and seemingly disjointed customs process, albeit carried out by diligent and not unfriendly people, did mean that the adventurers were not "free" to enter Turkmenistan until the early hours of the following morning!

Tom Mouse had to endure Dicky going on about how the Turkmenistan port authority was "crying out for process improvement, an integrated IT system, with clear accountabilities and effective leadership"...Tom Mouse rather liked all the bits of paper they received, each carefully stamped - you don't just wave a passport and walk into Turkmenistan - it is a very unique place as they'd see later.

They were to learn that the secretive, controlling dictatorship of Turkmenistan, a country the size of Spain, allows only 10,000 tourists into the county each year. Averaging this out, the adventure motorcyclists estimated that they represented about 10% of the tourist population for the week!

The adventure motorcyclists left the Caspian coast a day later to head some 350 miles across part of the Karakum Desert (Black Desert) and to the capital, Ashgabat. They anticipated temperatures in the high 30s and having to work to keep fluid levels up ... as it transpired it was belting with rain for much of the journey with spectacular lightning bolts arcing across the sky ...



The group had to leave their motorcycles outside of the city of Ashgabat as the hotel in which they were staying was opposite the Presidential palace and there were events planned apparently that precluded foreign vehicles from the area. What became clear rapidly was just how sensitive Turkmenistan was about "security" and this included no pictures being permitted of the palace and at a number of other locations and tourist spots. No snaps were allowed either of the guards as they stood on ceremony outside the many government or public buildings. Even taking pictures in the local market was not allowed! ... although Dicky did sneak a few ...

One morning Dicky, and other tourists in the hotel, were not allowed out of the front of the hotel - no explanation was given. It transpired the Presidential motor cavalcade was on the move!



A bus tour of Ashgabat highlighted the extent of the massive investment in striking white marble government buildings with huge tree lined boulevards. Elaborate stunning monuments, large blocks of pristine flats, and trophy buildings, all seemingly trying to assert the country's growing position, funded through its gas wealth. This included the world's largest indoor Ferris wheel ... which Tom Mouse thought somewhat defeated the purpose of a Ferris wheel as a way of getting a clear view of the surrounding area ... What was largely lacking overall was evidence of many people in this white, clean new world. The group was however later to see the more authentic communities in flats and houses which were largely from the Soviet era. Ashgabat left a feeling of a city and indeed a country that sought recognition but at the same time was struggling with itself as it demanded internal control and seemed not to tolerate any questioning.



... Tom Mouse was fascinated by the 5 state TV channels, all appearing to dutifully share and celebrate facets of Turkmenistan. One showed the president presenting Turkmenistan sheep dog puppies to members of the Army ...



The adventure motorcyclists rode over 150 miles north into the Karakum Desert, and set up camp just before the arrival of a huge storm. Later that night they went to see the stunning Darvaza gas crater ... Larger in area than a football pitch, the crater was formed after Soviet exploratory

drilling for gas and oil went wrong ... methane had started to escape and they thought the best thing to do was to set light to it thinking that it would burn itself out in 3 to 4 weeks ... that was in 1971, and it's still going strong! ...

The adventure motorcyclists generally concluded Turkmenistan was the strangest place they had visited, but also recognised that they were privileged to have had the opportunity ... they headed for the border with Uzbekistan ...



Day 31 ... Tom Mouse raised an eyebrow as Dicky enthusiastically met requests for selfies as they entered Uzbekistan ... to the adventure motorcyclists Uzbekistan almost immediately felt more open, the people more welcoming and engaging than the at times stifling Turkmenistan.

Currency exchange in Uzbekistan was fun; with approximately 10,000 Som to the £. The weight of the large wadges of notes required a belt on Dicky's trousers in order to avoid a sudden and embarrassing drop in the Som ...!

... the bill for an adventure motorcyclists' team meal came to a hefty 3.5 million ... paid for by Kevin with a very large block of new notes that was taller than Tom Mouse!



Tom Mouse loved Kevin's boundless and infectious enthusiasm. Kev and his wife Julia together are Guinness book of world record adventure motorcyclists. On this trip Kevin would ride along in the black Toyota pickup truck, smiling and barking words of encouragement ... "it's not a holiday, it's an adventure!" ... Tom Mouse thought about this, and liked this, although for Tom Mouse it was also a charity fundraising and a book promotion tour ...!



Khiva was one of the original towns along the Silk Route, with an impressive range of mosques and madrasahs ... their construction appeared to have been as much about establishing the position and legacy of wealthy and powerful leaders and noblemen as it was about homage to Allah and to the Islamic religion.

In Khiva, Dicky, Scott and George went off to find a jet wash to clean their bikes, and eventually found a fantastic place run by the delightful Gulmira and her family ... they just happened to run a restaurant adjacent to the car wash, and treated the intrepid motorcyclists to a fantastic spread of local foods, whilst the motorcycles were blasted to cleanliness.

The adventure motorcyclists spent a day in each of Khiva, Bukhara and Samarkand ... progressively larger and more significant cities along the ancient Silk Route.

The ride from Khiva to Bukhara was some 250 miles across the Qimiraqqum Desert (Red Desert), with temperatures of up to 35C. For a while the road was excellent, concrete dual carriageway sweeping across endless desert ... then suddenly the dual carriageway ended and it was dust and rubble for about a third of the journey, including a stop at a railway junction ... complete with a train passing through.



... Tom Mouse had his photo taken with the group's guide in Khiva ... Tom Mouse also gave her some Tom Mouse stickers for her young son.

Stunning work(wo)manship was so clearly evident in the Khiva and Bukhara carpet workshops visited by the adventure motorcyclists. Beautiful silk carpets, some with over 320 knots per cm squared, can take 2 women over two years to complete. The most expensive on sale was \$60,000!

... Tom Mouse and Dicky speculated that if you could fly home on your own carpet then perhaps this cost could be offset against your air fare ...

The adventure motorcyclists had thoroughly enjoyed their time in Uzbekistan with its wonderful people. They headed off (on motorcycles, not carpets) towards the border with Tajikistan ...

Chapter 4 ... Another Day Another 'Stan

Day 37 ... The adventure motorcyclists entered wonderful Tajikistan ... a country of spectacular mountains but largely barren. Outside of the capital Dushanbe, it appeared to be a much poorer country than its neighbour Uzbekistan.

... as the adventure motorcyclists were increasingly coming to expect, people were very welcoming ... waving and smiling. Many put their right hand on their heart as they acknowledged the adventure motorcyclists ... Dicky found this warm and personal action very moving ...

... Dicky & Tom Mouse came through the border crossing and were descended upon by money changers ... they were disappointed that Dicky initially only presented them with a 5000 Som note (about 50p), for exchange to Tajikistan Somoni ... the process established, a quantity of dollars was then exchanged.

They rode into the border town of Penjikent for the night. The hotel was quirky, requiring all of the adventure motorcyclists to leave their boots just inside the front door and that they wear the provided slippers ... Tom Mouse considered how funny it would be were all of the group required to wear "adventure slippers" rather than rugged motorcycle boots for the rest of the adventure ...



Next stop, Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan. In order to get there however, the key obstacle to be tackled was the neatly named, "tunnel of death" ... a 5km exhaust fume filled 2 lane passageway with lighting which pretty much ended after a few hundred metres, and with oncoming lorries and cars to add to the excitement ... It was snowing when Dicky and Tom Mouse entered the tunnel and immediately following the tunnel there was a long descent, which was clearly challenging too for the large lorries ... one was on its side in a ditch ...



As ever, the people, young and old, were all so welcoming and interested in the group. A small girl sat on Dicky's motorcycle to have her picture taken, and went away with a Tom Mouse sticker ... Dicky and Tom Mouse wondered if she and the other children given stickers would ever be able to explore Tom Mouse any further ... it turned out that the Tom Mouse website (www.TomMouse.co.uk) did not seem to have been blocked by the Tajikistan government ... Tom Mouse thought this was probably in view of his diplomatic immunity status.

The Tajikistan police were also very welcoming ... one, a police motorcyclist allowed Dicky to sit on his motorcycle, another flagged Dicky and Tom Mouse down in Dushanbe for a pleasant chat, albeit they were preparing for the Presidential cavalcade which then whizzed past; so perhaps there was a wider interest in the strangers in town ...

One of the big shopping successes for Tom Mouse in Dushanbe was a CCCP Magnum (an ice cream, not a hand gun) ... which was nearly as tall as he was ...

Dom, Pete and Kev led on the servicing of all of the adventure motorcyclists' bikes. Dom and Pete fitted new Avon TrekRider tyres to Dicky's bike ... in readiness for the rougher roads the adventure motorcyclists would face in the coming weeks. The more road based Avon TrailRider tyres were removed - they had been fantastic and appeared to be less than half way through their life after over 5000 miles.



Dom is the adventure motorcyclists' lead guide, a former British motorcycle champion, and makes riding any motorcycle in almost any conditions look very easy ... "apart from when he has no fuel", cheekily chuckled Tom Mouse ...

Onward to Kalaikhum, and riding on a rough road, shared with large articulated trucks and speeding 4x4s, alongside the Panj River which forms part of the border with Afghanistan. This border is truly fascinating, given its recent history, and with stunningly beautiful scenery. Snow peaked mountains reach over 5000m high. Afghan people on the road on their side of the border, and in their villages, occasionally reciprocate the enthusiastic waves from the adventure motorcyclists on the Tajikistan side of the river.



Refuelling at the "petrol station" in Kalaikhumn was an experience, using buckets. The children there were totally unfazed and delighted in sitting on the motorcycles and having their pictures taken ... they also seemed delighted and a wee bit quizzical to receive Tom Mouse stickers!



On to Korog and more challenging roads including deep sand and gravel as the adventure motorcyclists follow the Wakhan Valley and parts of the Pamir Highway, surrounded by the spectacular Pamir Mountains.



Highlights included Yamchun Fort, a "home stay" at Layangar, endless spectacular scenery, travelling alongside the Chinese border, and of course the welcoming and friendly people of Tajikistan.



... Tajikistan, a country of big mountains, big skies, and people with big hearts ...



... the adventure motorcyclists continued on the Pamir Highway successfully negotiating numerous very demanding high altitude passes, with broken roads, including the 4655m Akbaytal pass and headed to the border with Kyrgyzstan.



Day 44 ... The adventure motorcyclists headed over yet another high mountain pass with predictably poor roads, this time from Tajikistan, and entered into Kyrgyzstan ... a country of rolling green, leading to stark barren snow capped mountains, with horses a new feature, along with the ever present goats, donkeys, sheep and cattle. The people were again very warm and welcoming.



They rode through a sharp severe hail storm and arrived at the very basic village of Sary-Tash, ... which Tom Mouse insisted on calling "scary moustache" ...

The following day, at a stop for tea, they met with a number of children and their families. They lived in yurts and also in what looked like old converted rail carriages. They were all so friendly and interested in the adventure motorcyclists, as they were in them. Dicky, Tom Mouse and the other adventure motorcyclists felt so privileged to be experiencing this adventure and meeting these people.



Later, Dicky and Tom Mouse met a Belgian cyclist and Bear who had amongst other countries travelled through Iran, which they had loved ... Tom Mouse thought that Bear looked a bit big for a cycling bear, but was too polite to say ... The intrepid pairs of travellers compared their recent travel experiences and immediate future plans, posed for photographs, and then carried on their separate ways ...

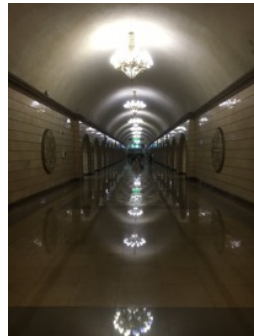


The capital of Kyrgyzstan is Bishkek, and like so many major cities in Central Asia is ambitious, increasingly wealthy and looking and feeling very much like a Central European city. There remains however a huge contrast with the poverty and simplicity of the countryside in Central Asia.

The adventure motorcyclists crossed over another border, this time into Kazakhstan, (the 18th country of the adventure), the 9th largest country in the world, yet with a population of less than 19 million ...

Almaty is the largest city in Kazakhstan, with a population of over 1.7 million. Dicky, Jim and Tom Mouse explored the city, initially with a taxi ride and then up in a cable car to Kok Tobe hill which overlooks the city. Tom Mouse was very excited by the cable car and announced, "the name is Mouse, Tom Mouse", and promptly hung upside down in the cable car ... Dicky and Jim hummed the James Bond theme tune in support ...

They also went on the city's underground, which was opened in recent years and is modelled on the iconic Moscow underground, although it only has a single line and some 9 stations. Tom Mouse also enjoyed watching the Almaty junior Taekwondo championships at the city sports centre ...



In Almaty the adventure motorcyclists said sad goodbyes to Len, Pam and Anantha, who were, as planned, leaving the group, their adventure over but each with a lifetime of fantastic memories ...

Some 100 miles from Almaty, on their way to the spectacular Charyn Canyon, Dicky and Tom Mouse met the amazing Doreen. She was some 8 months into cycling from Singapore back to her home in the Netherlands. Dicky and Tom Mouse were awestruck; it made their adventure seem very easy. Dicky made a note to research cycling adventures, for future years!



... the adventure motorcyclists turned back over the border again in to Kyrgyzstan ... skirting alongside the magnificent Issyk Kul Lake (the world's 10th largest lake by volume and at over 2000 feet is the 7th deepest) ... they headed on to the border town of Narin, to prepare for their crossing in to China!

Chapter 5 ... Journey's End - Mount Everest

... Tom Mouse felt that the mountain road linking Kyrgyzstan to China's autonomous region of Xinjiang was the most beautiful and spectacular approach he had ever seen from one country to another. The route also presented the adventure motorcyclists with flurries of snow and near freezing temperatures, adding to their dramatic entry. They were making their final and most significant border crossing, into country number 19 and the People's Republic of China.



Arrival at the Chinese border high up in the mountains started a three day process. A process which was not always entirely clear to the adventure motorcyclists, to enable them and their bikes to pass through border security and customs, gaining formal entry into the vast, powerful, rapidly growing and sensitive country of China.

Tom Mouse thought it very funny when at the border all of the adventure motorcyclists and their motorcycles were sprayed with a disinfectant: Tom hid in the tank bag of Dicky's motorcycle. The motorcycles were also X-rayed all together in a machine which appeared new and was clearly designed for large lorries.

Dicky and the other adventure motorcyclists, after a number of days, were each equipped with a Chinese driving licence and a new number plate for their bike, (although this only needed to be carried and not fixed to the bike). Tom Mouse chuckled when it was revealed that a mistake had been made with Dicky's licence and that it stated that he was a woman. Tom said that Dicky should have got Pete to cut his hair after all! There was no time to correct the licence and Dicky hoped it wouldn't cause any issues.



Unlike many of the "stans", where security was evident but relatively covert, entry into western China provided a highly visible display of strength and control. All photography was strictly prohibited as the adventure motorcyclists approached and crossed over the border. There were security and speeding cameras at frequent intervals on the road stretching for tens of miles towards the regional capital of Kashgar, along with regular check points equipped with scanners and armed police. All public buildings, including schools and petrol stations had reinforced barricades with armed guards. Dicky said to Tom Mouse that he felt that it appeared that the biggest employer in the region was the police force, and that the largest industry was the razor wire business.

Dicky, Tom Mouse and the other adventure motorcyclists had expected the city of Kashgar to be heaving with bicycles. There were however very few bicycles on the streets. Instead there were hundreds of electric scooters. Dicky spent some time photographing the huge variety of machines and their pilots silently whizzing along the designated lanes of the city's streets. Like China, their scooters were going places, and fast.



As the adventure motorcyclists waited at their hotel in the centre of Kashgar they realized how privileged they were to witness just some of life in western China.

The ancient Muslim quarter of Kashgar was beautiful and strangely quiet, with a mix of shops opened onto the streets, including a dentist! A joyous wedding took place at the hotel. A series of pageants was also being conducted. And, as ever, the adventure motorcyclists were in demand for impromptu photoshoots with eager locals and Chinese tourists alike.



The adventure motorcyclists were given a police escort out of the city of Kashgar, and on their way towards Tibet and Mount Everest (Mt Qomolangma), the target for Tom Mouse and Dicky's adventure.

... the adventure motorcyclists headed up onto the Tibetan plateau, and for several weeks would spend much of their time over 4000m, and sometimes above 5000m as they traversed the numerous snowy high mountain passes.

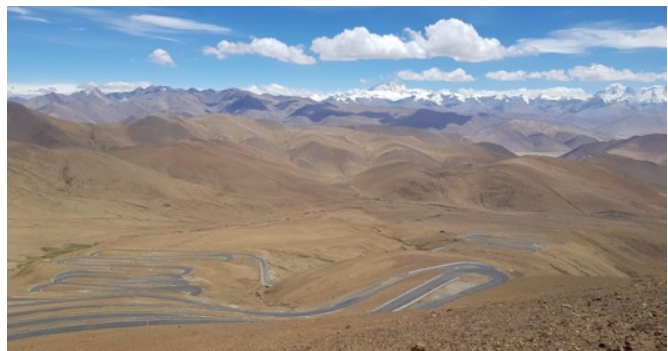
They stopped near the beautiful and religiously significant Mount Kailash (over 6,600m). The mountain and the nearby Lake Manasarovar (one of the highest freshwater lakes in the world at over 4,500m) are pilgrimage destinations for four religions, Buddhism, Jainism, Bon and Hinduism. Four major Central Asian rivers have their source in the area; the Brahmaputra, the Indus, the Sulej and the Ghaghara (a major tributary of the Ganges).



Dicky, Tom Mouse and the other adventure motorcyclists saw hundreds of military vehicles on the move in Tibet, likely travelling to and from their expansive and remote training areas. They heard the large artillery guns firing through the thin snow filled air. They waved cheery waves towards the soldiers and received warm smiles and waves in return.

For Tom Mouse and Dicky the climax and target for the motorcycle adventure was to ride to Mount Everest (Mt Qomolangma) Base Camp in Tibet. After travelling 10,000 miles from the Ace Café in London, through 19 countries, over 10 weeks, they had made it. They had been privileged to experience a wealth of places and cultures. They had travelled on some amazing and challenging roads, through extremes of weather. They had built friendships with a fantastic group of fellow adventurers. They had with help from so many sponsors, including corporate support from Avon Tyres and from NGK Spark Plugs, raised funds for the Down's Syndrome Association and for Woolgrove School, Special Needs Academy.

Tom Mouse and Dicky were the highest motorcyclists in the World!





Epilogue ... We should all aspire to be children again

Tom Mouse and Dicky reflected that even with a wonderful variety and mix of countries and cultures, we all have more in common than we have differentiate us. Ultimately the common denominator is humanity (and the equivalent for mice!), and the best and most pure examples can be seen in the young children - their lack of fear, only curiosity, their smiles and sense of fun. ... We should all aspire to be children again.

Tom Mouse looked at Dicky and said, "I wonder where our next fantastic adventure will be?"

Dicky Barr

Summer 2019



"We don't stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing."
- George Bernard Shaw

A short video of the adventure can be found on the Tom Mouse website
www.TomMouse.co.uk

Further photographs and commentary can be found on Dicky's charity challenge website
www.ChallengePictures.co.uk