

51st Traverse: Biking Russia to London for Charity

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Five young Kiwis are about to embark on the adventure of a lifetime. With limited motorbike experience, they will attempt to motorbike from Vladivostok Russia to London England across some of the world's toughest terrain.

The crew of five - all in their mid-twenties - say they decided to tackle the 25,000 kilometre trip "because we were tired of only talking and dreaming about big ideas - we wanted to actually do something: we wanted to tackle the biggest project we could imagine".

Before deciding to take the trip last year, only one of the five crew members could ride a motorbike. "We had to learn the hard way," laughs Rob Gray, corporate lawyer, aged 24, "by figuring out how to ride our bikes as we drove them out of the Suzuki dealership for the first time".

That was a year ago. Since then, the crew have invested a lot of time, effort and money into gaining the skills necessary to be self-sufficient on a trip across the world. "We didn't just have to learn how to ride", Mike Jacobson, a business strategist, says, "we also had to learn how to fix our bikes - if anything goes wrong, we'll be on our own". The crew have also dedicated time to learning to speak Russian, training in first aid and practising for life on the road by taking a number of trips around back-country New Zealand.

Where they are going

The crew will need all the training they can get. Their route stretches for 25,000 kilometres, spanning 18 countries and a wide variety of cultures, climates and regions. "We have to be prepared to face everything", comments Misha Kravcenko, a PE teacher in South Auckland. "We will be crossing some of the world's worst roads, highest mountains, hottest deserts and most remote areas."

Completing the trip, dubbed "The 51st Traverse", as the route loosely follows the 51st parallel, will be a huge test in itself. However, the crew are not stopping there. They've undertaken another challenge: raising \$25,000 for Living Hope, a New Zealand-registered charity based in Vladivostok that works with local street children.

Riding for charity

The decision to support a grass-roots charity like Living Hope was made two years ago, when planning for the trip was still in its early phases. "I spent some time with Russian street children a couple of years ago", says Rob, "just long enough to be shocked by the conditions they live in.

In weather so cold most people don't venture outside (dropping as low as -40C) these kids were forced to wander the streets, shunned by society, sleeping in sewers and basements."

Living Hope works with children like these to give them a hope and a future: educating them, loving them and feeding them. By aligning with Living Hope, the crew plan to raise enough money to build a dormitory that will house 20 street children. As Tom Anselmi, an aircraft engineer and keen snowboarder, puts it, "that's 20 kids that will sleep in a safe, warm, clean environment instead of shivering in doorways or curling up in sewers. That's 20 children who will be given some dignity instead of being forced to live in inhumane squalor."

The crew are candid about the difficulties that lie ahead: "a lot could go wrong", agrees Rob Climo, a banking and finance lawyer, originally from Kerikeri, "but we're not letting that stop us. We're excited about the challenge. We'll prepare as best we can, and then tackle the rest as we go." Historically, New Zealanders have been known for their determination and ingenuity in the face of adversity. By the time the crew arrive in London in September 2010, they are likely to know all about it.

5 blokes, 5 bikes, 18 countries, 25,000 kilometres. One epic adventure.

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