

Life and Times

Charley Boorman



Riding out the hard times

The TV presenter celebrates recovery from a motorbike accident with an African adventure

ABOUT A YEAR AGO, I broke both legs in a motorcycle accident in Portugal. One was worse than the other – I broke my right ankle and smashed my left tibia and fibula really badly.

For six months I was off the bike, then I started with a little moped – I had a big cage around my leg holding everything together, so I could sit on the Vespa without changing gears. Finally, in January I managed to start riding a motorbike again properly. My family know better than to try and stop me from doing that – motorcycles have been my whole life since I was nine years old.

To get back in shape after the accident I've been doing quite a lot of physio and hydrotherapy, and lately I've started Pilates sessions with this extraordinary man called Dreas Reyneke. I first went to him when I was 17 or 18 because I had a bit of a hunch in my back – he helped me grow an inch.

I hadn't seen him for 30 years. He's now 80, and looks fantastic. I've been going to him twice a week at his studio in Notting Hill, in west London. He helps stretch the tendons in my legs that I haven't used since the accident; I lie on a resistance machine and push it

with my legs, holding on with my toes. It hurts and I often need a lie down afterwards, but it's worth it, not least because it helped me get ready for my recent trip to Africa.

My wife, Olivia, and I went to Kenya – ostensibly to visit friends, but while there we also wanted to see a few big animals, of course.

First we headed to Mount Kenya, to witness one of the most effective conservation methods in Africa: Mount Kenya Trust's horse patrols. MKT has been battling to uphold the separation of wildlife and humans in the foothills of Mount Kenya since 1999, but it's over the last decade or so, as they've placed an emphasis on patrolling on horseback, that success has been extraordinary: illegal poaching, logging, snaring and cattle grazing have been reduced by as much as 80 per cent. Thanks to a link with the charity Tusk, we got up on a couple of horses and joined them.

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It was worth it just for the steeds. The rangers ride beautiful, slender Ethiopian horses that are sturdy enough for the steep landscape. The locals, who might try and snare elephants, are made nervous by the rangers' presence now, so they don't dare.

We moved slightly north (and down into the sweltering heat) for a unique safari at Saruni Rhino, where we walked with black rhinos. It's the first rhino-tracking experience in east Africa and it's incredible, but we had to be stealthy – they're a lot more used to vehicles annoying them than humans. We managed to get up close. They were majestic, beautiful – and massive.

In the same day, we saw leopards, hippos, kudus, cheetahs and a particularly potent-looking scorpion.

I've been coming to Africa for decades. I first went with my father (film director John Boorman) in 1973, but my love for it was set in stone when I did *Long Way Round* with Ewan McGregor in 2007. On motorcycles, we travelled from Tunisia to Cape Town. I'd known Ewan for years; we're on the same wavelength, which helped as some parts of the journey were tough, especially in Mongolia.

I try to go back whenever I can, and take a bunch of people on motorbikes from Cape Town to Victoria Falls each year. So even though this trip's over, it won't be long before I'm back in the saddle in Africa.

Long Way Back by Charley Boorman (AA Publishing, £20) is out on 1 May

THE LIST

Reading

Dawn French's novel, *Oh Dear Silvia*.

Watching

T2 Trainspotting, the sequel to *Trainspotting*, and disaster film *Deepwater Horizon*.

Loving

The tuna and avocado *mousse* at Trinity, in Clapham, London – my wife and I went there for our 25th anniversary recently.

Hating

Rhino poaching – it's shocking that a poor rhino was killed by poachers at a French zoo just this month.