

my expedition through South America. But at last, armed with the advance on a book that I promised to write some time in the future, I flew to Buenos Aires, Argentina. I left London on the 1st of April — why not, I thought — but it was not until I arrived in Buenos Aires did I realize that I was landing in Argentina on the anniversary of the invasion of the Falkland Islands. At first I told everyone that I met that I was French, rather than admitting my British citizenship; but when it became apparent that the Argentines bore no grudge I dropped the pretense.

My first problem was finding two suitable horses. The plan of the expedition was to ride 8,000 kilometers across Argentina, Bolivia and Peru, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In the way, of course, were the mighty Andes; so I needed horses that would be capable of traveling enormous distances at great heights, with minimal food and water.

In Argentina lives the perfect breed, the criollo, taken over to South America by the Spanish in the 16th century. They are renowned for their strength, endurance and insanity. For the purposes of this expedition I found two, named el Chapeton and Viento Norte. They were to be my companions for the next 10 months.

We rode into the pampas, the huge plains that initially I found quite awesome in size, and into the lives of the gauchos who still travel everywhere by horse and who run the *estancias* of cattle that fuel the Argentine economy. Their hospitality was spontaneous and knew no bounds. I lived on a diet of wine, bread, *mate* (the bitter tea) and meat. This last is eaten in vast quantities — it is not unusual to eat a kilo at one sitting. Not only the gauchos but people from all walks of life gave and helped us (myself and my horses) in any way that they could.

One night I was staying at a remote police traffic control unit. The police are amongst the worst paid in a country that was suffering from 1 million percent annual inflation at the time. Salaries were wiped out over-

night and my companions in the police station found themselves without the funds to pay for the traditional hospitality. Before I could prevent them, they had extracted sufficient bribes from passing traffic, stopped on spurious grounds, to pay for a huge meal. The climb into the Andes took us two months, slowly ascending at the speed of a horse and therefore suffering from none of the effects of *soroche*, the altitude sickness that can bring down even the fittest if they allow insufficient time to acclimatize. After six months in Argentina, we entered Bolivia, a country populated by the small, squat Quechuan peoples who live their whole lives at altitudes of over 3,500 meters.

Peru was our next stop, riding up to 14 hours a day through territory controlled by Sendero Luminoso, the terrorist group that is waging a civil war against the authorities. Social unrest, however, cannot undermine the spirit of the people or the beauty of the

spectacular country through which I was riding. We arrived at Cusco, spent some time exploring the historical legacy of the Incas before climbing the final range of the Andes at heights in excess of 5,500 meters. From the top of the Andes we dropped to the coastal desert of Peru in three days. From -10°C to 40°C in three days! One thousand kilometers up a coast where nothing grows — it never rains — and we had arrived at our final destination, Lima, the capital of Peru.

But that was just the beginning. The hours in the saddle had given me an idea. I wanted to ride further than Tschiffely, I wanted to do something that had never been done before. I wanted to be the first person to ride by horse around the world: through the Americas, Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

Which is what brings me to Japan. Two years of preparation in England and we (this

time I will be accompanied by my wife) are almost ready to leave. I have again received immense hospitality from many people and organizations in Japan; particularly the Arcadia riding club at Gotenba. In return, during our trip through Asia, we will be raising money for the Thromboisis Research Institute and also conducting a project observing working animals in the countries we pass through for Edinburgh University.

Not that we will find many working animals as we cross Japan from Mount Fuji to Kanazawa and the Sea of Japan. We will however be crossing some of the most spectacular scenery in the country as we will travel through the High Alps, hopefully encouraging others to explore their beauty and mysteries. Our main problem is of course, traffic but we have mapped out a route of trails, disused paths and lightly used roads that will take us as far as possible away from motorized vehicles. Camping out at night will enable us to avoid annoying people in villages. We should see a side of Japan, inaccessible and hidden from the ordinary tourist.

Riding through civilized Japan is one thing. Halfway round the globe is another. Are we mad? Is it impossible? In the middle of the night I sometimes think so. But we will succeed. Soon we will have started and the world will begin to unfurl before us — at the natural speed of a horse.

*James Greenwood set off from the base of Mount Fuji on Aug. 9 and is due to reach the Japan Sea coast late in September. After Japan he plans to ride through Vietnam, Southeast Asia, China, India, the Central Asian republics, and thence into Europe. Further reports and updates on his progress will be carried at occasional intervals on the MDN Asia Focus page. Readers wishing to contact him or contribute to his sponsorship can do so through the Mainichi Daily News.*

