

inspiring **MIND**

ROADS *more* TRAVELED

STEPHEN FABES IS ON THE FINAL LEG OF A FIVE-YEAR JOURNEY AROUND THE WORLD BY BIKE.

WORDS **NATASHA ISHAK**



As he sits at the dining table of a swanky members-only health club in Central Jakarta, Stephen Fabes takes a chug out of his water bottle – ignoring the wine glass in front of him – and eases into his seat. He has a couple of minutes to spare for an interview with *JPlus* before speaking to potential donors about his incredible journey and, hopefully, raise enough funds to support his trip back home to the UK.

Dressed in his finest – a worn-out gray shirt, dark cargo pants, sneakers and flimsy baseball cap – the mild-mannered Englishman does not seem to fit the stereotype of an adventurous type who would give up his comfortable life as a medical doctor in London and hit the road.

In fact, Fabes, 33, has been cycling across the globe since January 2010 equipped only with a rucksack and his trusty bicycle.

He has journeyed through six continents and covered more than 60,100 kilometers of land, equivalent to more than one round-trip around the globe – all on two-wheels.

He documents his experience on the road every few weeks on his blog www.cyclingthe6.com, where readers can get involved in the fund-raising he has done to support non-governmental organizations providing medical assistance for neglected tropical diseases through his cycling.

So far, he has raised more than 20,000 pounds sterling for medical NGO Merlin.

Unlike the typical travel log peppered with fancy photos showcasing only the best of journeys to the unknown, Fabes illustrates his ups-and-downs candidly in a whimsical manner; among the wonderful stories of new lands and extraordinary kindness, tales of fatigue and frustration can be read too.

At 19, the Oxford-born lad made his first cycling trip through South America with his younger brother.

The trip left a lasting impression. But it was not until a decade later, after downing a few beers one night, Fabes, who then worked at St. Thomas' Hospital in Central London, finally set his mind to doing it again – alone.

Fabes admits to have a second thought as he waved goodbye to family and friends outside the hospital four years ago.

“It was not easy at all, I very much had my doubts,” Fabes recalls the start of his journey. “I actually stopped at a pub a few blocks away to think about what I was getting myself into. Everyone probably thought I was already half-way to Paris by then but I knew I couldn't back out,” he says with a chuckle.

“I'd already told everyone I would do it, so I just needed to get on with it.”

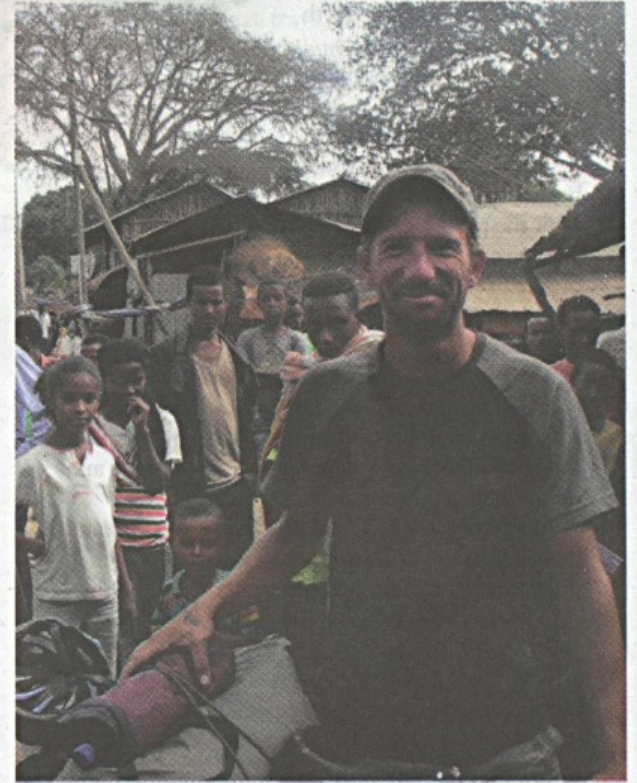
GOING THE DISTANCE

It is that same determination that has accompanied Fabes on his miraculous journey across the world. Both man and mechanical companion have endured plenty, from traversing the scorching African Sahara to navigating the slippery slopes of the great European alps.

It is difficult to imagine a more vulnerable state than living each day off less than US\$1 with a modest means of transport venturing into foreign places.

Fabes carries a modest supply of water and food. Daily meals are kept practical (noodles and biscuits) and often times he relies on the generosity of strangers; the same goes for his bed at night, and the luxury of enjoying a simple shower.

He has encountered great support and hospitality from the people he has met. One thing the experience has taught



him, he says, is the world is not as scary as people make it out to be.

“I am always given well-meaning warnings from people I meet about the supposedly dangerous destination I will travel to next. But when I get there, the locals over there will warn me about the dangers in the *next* area,” he explains.

“So it’s basically everyone calling out everyone else. Of course, there are certain places travelers need to be wary of, and I have had my fair share of troubles, but at the end of the day, there really isn’t anything horribly bad.”

When it comes to extending hospitality to him in his times of need, he names Syria and parts of Africa for leaving the deepest impressions.

ALONG FOR THE RIDE

Fabes has mostly endured the long journey thus far on his own, say for the occasional fellow explorer or two met along the way.

Claire Press, 29, is his latest travel buddy, as well as Fabes’ girlfriend. The couple reunited after Press flew to Sydney in November to join her boyfriend on the road.

As someone who has known Fabes for years, Press, who works as a youth councilor back in the UK and has set about recording local musicians on stops during the trip, notes how the experience has influenced the British doctor.

“He’s definitely shown me it is a lot easier to achieve something when taken in stride,” she says. “I think that’s really useful thinking in all things in life because if you want to take on something big, sometimes you really can’t take it on all at once. You need to take it one step at a time.”

Indonesia is part of Fabes’ final Asian swing on his six-continent escapade. Entering from Timor Leste into Flores, then traveling through Sumbawa, Lombok and Bali,

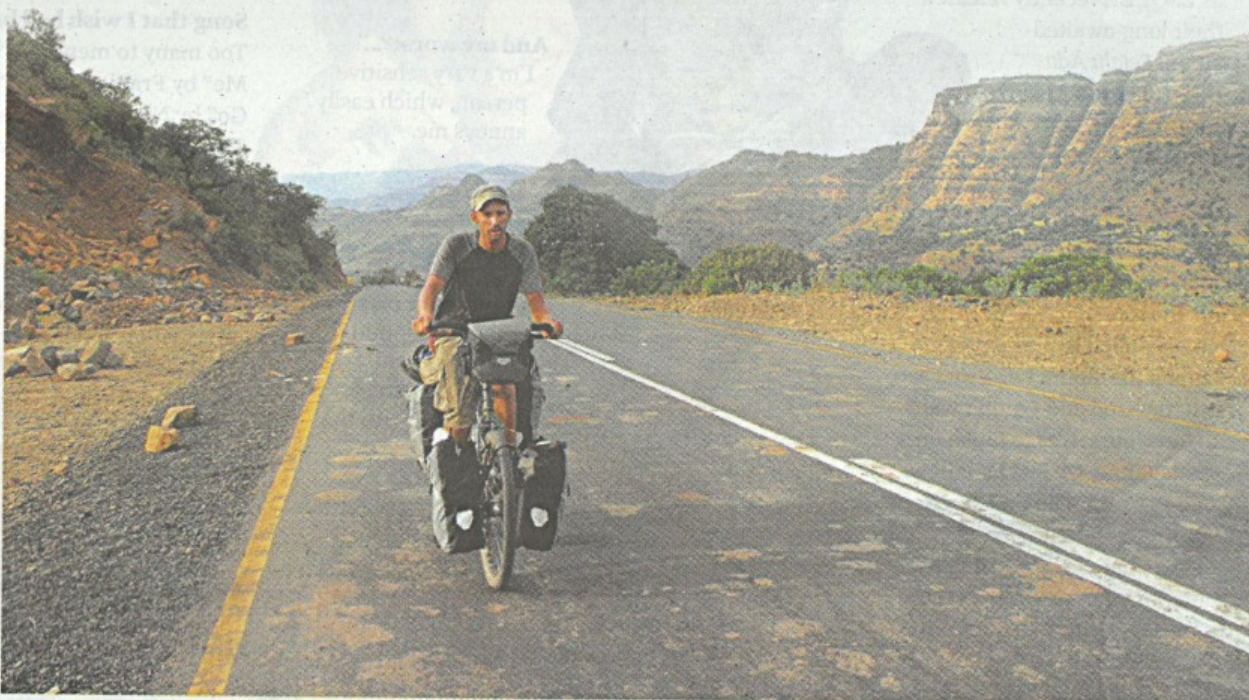
eastern Indonesia’s rocky roads have proven challenging yet rewarding.

“Indonesia has been very exciting,” he says. “Since we arrived in Flores, the people here have been extremely hospitable and friendly toward us. I find the culture very rich as well. Every time we’ve moved places in the country, we’ve always found a different set of cultures and traditions. It’s been great.”

Next, apart from wrapping up the final leg of his journey (Fabes hopes to be back in the UK by next year),

is a book deal currently in the works, as well as a new website covering handy how-tos and tips for the more adventurous travelers.

Asked what his plans entail after his bike is returned to the garage, Fabes replies: “I’m not sure how I’ll adjust resuming to normal life when I get back home. I’ve always considered myself a traveler, so I still want to be involved in that some way, but I’m also looking forward to picking up where I left off in the medical field. We’ll have to wait and see.”



Photos courtesy of Stephen Fabes