

British cyclists in charity ride

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By Peter Townson/Staff Reporter

Two Britishers recently completed a bicycle journey around the entire peninsula of Qatar to raise money for two separate charities, calling their adventure the Tour de Qatar, and already collecting nearly QR20,000 in sponsorship.

James Charnock explained that having read Graeme Obree’s biography *The Flying Scotsman*, he was inspired to cycle from Land’s End to John O’Groats for charity in the UK.

However, a friend and fellow rugby player, Alan Smith suggested that he should start off by cycling around Qatar instead, and so the two decided to plan the Tour de Qatar.

With recent events at Qatar Animal Welfare Society (QAWS) leaving the pets without a shelter, and with their keen interest in rugby, the pair decided to raise money for QAWS and the Wooden Spoon foundation, a sports related charity which raises money for young people.

The Wooden Spoon have recently set up a chapter in Qatar, and have already been donating money to a charity in Nepal to help fund young children’s education in that country.

And so over Eid, the pair decided to make their trip. “Alan and I measured our route by car, not only to see how far the circuit would be, but to check out the terrain and pick out landmarks as much of our route was across the desert,” explained Charnock.

“At one point we actually had to build our own landmark so we knew when to cut across the desert.”

“It was amazing to see parts of Qatar that we would not otherwise have had the inclination to visit,” he added.

After setting off from Mesaieed, the cyclists travelled to Doha before riding on to the Al Ghariyah resort just past Fuwairit, which they reached on the first day. Using the hard shoulder of main roads as well as feeder roads and tracks, they tried to avoid riding on the road as much as possible.

“What a brilliant feeling it was cycling through the desert with no one to be seen for miles,” noted Charnock.

The second day took the pair to Dukhan, during which they saw a number of “interesting landmarks”, and encountered camels on the road — something they captured on video to show to friends in the UK.

The next day they travelled to their personally-built landmark, and on the final day they found themselves on a side road to the truck route in Mesaieed — a moment they realised they had come close to arriving home after their travels.

“All our neighbours were out in the street to greet us. We were elated as we crossed the finishing line and it was an amazing feeling to complete our trek,” explained Charnock, adding “our total final measurement was 489km which was further than the 472km measured in the car. We do however have to take into consideration that we rarely cycled in a straight line!”

“We will always have fond memories of our first Tour de Qatar and I would love to make this an annual event and hopefully to get other cyclists interested in taking part next year,” he added.



James Charnock (right) and Alan Smith raised nearly QR20,000 for charity following their bike ride

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