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We covered the preparations for Kevin and Karen Browne's round-the-world trip in previous issues. They finally left the UK in early June and have been sending progress reports via their website www.guzzioverland.co.uk. Here are some edited extracts of their progress up to the end of June 2010.

Progress Report (early June)

We have so far travelled through France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. The roads are a challenge especially in the north; the only time I have ever seen roads as pot holed was in Africa. I am told Russian roads are even worse so that should be interesting. We hope to be in Bulgaria by the end of tomorrow and Turkey a day or two later. We have visas starting for Azerbaijan at the end of June and two more for Kazakhstan and Mongolia to pick up in Ankara.

More Progress

We crossed into Bulgaria early this morning and we are currently in a campsite in Kazanlac midway through Bulgaria. We hopefully will get into Turkey tomorrow or the next day. It's getting really hot now which is cutting down our riding time slightly. The roof has been an absolute lifesaver in the heat. I am so glad I persevered with it – we have not taken it down since we left.

Turkey at last

We have just swum in the Meditterean! We are in a campsite by the sea with straw umbrella shades and a bar. Shame we can't stay, just watched the sun setting over the sea. It was postcard stuff.

Bike continues to draw attention – two guys in a van in Bulgaria nearly crashed off the road. Their eyes were so far out on stalks it was like a Bugs bunny cartoon. We had to ask some Romanian truck drivers to use their grease gun as the rear wheel bearings were beginning to grumble, not surprising after our 12km detour on mountain roads yesterday.

June 11, Cappadocia and beyond

We left Ankara on Thursday afternoon having obtained our visas for Kazakhstan and headed down to the Cappadocia region in central Turkey.

We stayed in a town called Goreme and riding there in the dark was magical as the whole town is built in and around what the locals call fairy chimneys, pillars of a material called Tufa which is a mix of volcanic ash and mud. This is extremely soft and the action of wind and rain has eroded it into thousands of columns and a myriad of strange shapes. Cappadocia is a beautiful region; we want to stay longer but the clock on the visas is ticking loudly so tomorrow we head towards Georgia.

Meeting people

Turkey has been amazing for meeting people. Some have really gone out of their way to help namely Ozgur who loaned the use of his computer whilst Kev changed the oil on the bike, buying us ice creams, dinner and being a star. The mechanics who not only fixed the alternator but treated us to impromptu lunch. The English travellers on a BMW and Triumph, Michael and especially Geoff who gave up his furry seat cover to save Kev's bottom from chafe wounds (it did the trick – hope your ride home wasn't too sore). The lady who I asked where to buy some bread; when she finally understood went and got one from the restaurant kitchen refusing to take any money. We love Turkey and only wish we could have stayed a lot longer we would love to return.

June 12, leaving Turkey

We are currently in Baku, Azerbaijan waiting to cross the Caspian sea into Kazakhstan.

Leaving Cappadocia we headed north and east trundling along nicely until the dual carriageway went into one, then both sharing, then wallop – end of tarmac – no warnings so we go our merry way with cars and lorries all jostling for their bit of road.

Next day into Erzican to find a garage to fix the alternator. The mechanics excelled themselves; not only did they fix the alternator by taking it apart to its bare components they also went out of their way to make us lunch an excellent meal of mince, tomatoes some spice, eggs all eaten with fresh bread and washed down with a cup of cay (chi) all this for £15.00.

Lots of photos later we departed for Trazbon up in the mountains. We got so high we ended up riding through the cloud cover, a very surreal experience not seeing in front

of you on a twisty mountain road but they had flashing lights on the edge so it was OK.



Karen goes native in Turkey



Lunch at the alternator repair shop

June 15, Georgia

Fairly easy border, only an hour or so, but what a culture change the other side. It seems a very poor country. The roads are non-existent in towns but full of lorries, people, wildlife and no road signs. We had no mapping as I managed to lose the only map on the road. The heat is increasing daily and the roads are deteriorating; it's all good fun.

June 15, Azerbaijan

First taste of border madness. Got stamped out OK but I got off bike – big mistake – I am now a nobody and have to queue with the locals in 30° heat at 10.00am. They want \$50 customs and we don't think we have it. We're in but the bike isn't. We only scrape together \$49 (thank god I asked for dollars as a leaving gift from work, thank you all at Horsham Library and Nige & Sharon). We're in!

Stopped twice by police first time the language barrier seemed to work. Our second stop was a little more serious. We were taken to an office and asked for \$50 then reduced to \$30, then \$20. It was only when I made myself comfortable, removed my jacket and Kev opened his empty wallet they relented and waved us out.

In the next town I was approached by what turned out to be a local TV station. We were filmed and interviewed so we are officially demi-famous, only on local Ganja TV but it made up for the cop earlier.



June 15, first tumble

Woke lateish hot, hot, hot. Got packed up from our free camp in a kind of thistle valley, all uneven. Let Kev ride out solo as tricky. He had barely got going when he hit a funny camber, went to put his foot down but just found air so over she went. He fell off quite spectacularly – no damage to Kev but bike looking a little sorry. Roof torn slightly but repairable and cracked the two side screens. It took us ages to get her upright as it was in a kind of hollow; much sweat later we were ready to go.

Most of the route today was following the silk road and judging by the state of some of the roads we may have even touched some of the original!

Ended up at 5.00pm entering Baku city centre. Traffic everywhere. After attempting to enquire when the ferry was going the general gist was “come back tomorrow.” Ready to leave the next day; went to get money but the ATM swallowed Karen's card – great timing.

Arrived at port, saw our usual Russian who said “no ship” so we wrote down the name of the ship, went back and waved it under his nose saying “yes, ship.” Eventually haggled and got tickets, jumped through usual hoops and got on board about four hours later.

Leaving Baku

We blagged a cheap cabin sharing with two Turkish lorry drivers. Everything grand until one of the Russians took a fancy to me (Karen) and fuelled with vodka tried to enter the cabin four times whilst Kev was asleep. Eventually I clambered into the same bunk as Kev and locked the door, unfortunately locking out the Turkish guys as well but they were OK in morning when I explained. We arrived in Kazakhstan at 24 hours later.

June 27, 2010, Kazakhstan

We arrived in Aktau on the ferry at 1.00pm. We all had to remain on the ship until the sniffer dog had gone round each cabin. We all then boarded a minibus to customs. An hour later we reboarded the ferry to collect the bike; all the lorries were gone. We headed for the barrier but were told to wait as we now had to do all the bike customs. Four offices later we caught up with our lorry drivers who were also jumping through the customs hoops. We finally rode through the barrier into Kazakhstan at 7.00pm seven hours after arriving.

We arrived in Aktau city centre at 8.00pm. Two hotels are full. At the most expensive one the receptionist was lovely considering I turned up covered in road grime and said sorry but I could not afford \$322 a room but could they recommend anywhere really cheap? She spoke good English and phoned four hotels and found one. On the way out a young lad on a

Television stars in Azerbaijan!

Kazakhstan highway

bike comes over and phones his friend who speaks good English. Kirill turns up on his bike and we are escorted through town, two bikes in front and two more behind; we feel like royalty! The question on everyone's lips is "where are you from?" We are then treated to dinner and beers and introduced to friends but conversation is only really through Kirill as we speak no Russian and they have no English.

We spend another day in Aktau but have to change hotel as ours is full. We eventually score a good result on our hotel; it's only been open three days. Jill is English and has been overseeing the building and furnishing. She says that if we can leave within the five days before registering it is worth while as the authorities can keep your passport for a couple of days – so we plan to leave tomorrow. We have to be prepared for the next stretch as even the locals all say the road is bad, "like the surface of the moon" it has been described.

June 27, the surface of the Moon

Today we tackle THE ROAD. For a while it is fine then we face a 350km stretch of no petrol, towns and no road to speak of. The surface of the moon is not far out. Imagine a dust road which in winter becomes a mud bath through which heavy lorries travel, creating big groves and sink holes. Sprinkle with gravel every now and then, and multiply by six as when it gets too bad on the main 'road' everyone takes to the plains creating a multiple choice of routes, all as bad as each other.

We trundle along for about 40km when the bike starts to misfire badly. We have no shade and the heat is intense. Kev thinks it is the coil as we changed one in Baku so he tries that – no joy. Now he is a molten pool of sweat. The plugs are black and oily. Eventually we get her to run but not well. Kev is suffering from mild heat stroke so as it's 4.00pm we backtrack to the last town, 40km away.

We make it to a kind of bus stop where Kev virtually falls off the bike he is so wiped out. I go into the shops to score some iced tea and water and fully expect to come back and find a molten pool where Kev once was but no he's still in one piece. The heat is now catching up with me and I have a splitting headache. Some time later revived a bit we score some petrol and head back out of town and in the shade of the only trees for miles



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we change the jets to try stop the misfire which we think is caused by the plugs fouling on poor quality petrol, then continue to the start of the rough stuff where we make camp ready to leave at first light.

It's dawn so we pack up the tarp, our second night truly under the stars which last night were magnificent – certainly no light pollution here. We are fueled up and have enough water and now know what to expect what could possibly go wrong?

Approaching Goreme