

Don't forget the tea bags if you make a solo bike tour across Africa.

## Jacqueline Morley reports

**E**verything stops for tea – even a solo motorbike tour across Africa. Ask marathon bike rider Alan Whelan, of Lytham.

He went 14,000 miles solo through Morocco, Mauritania, Mali and all the way to Cape Town.

Small wonder he was parched.

Now his extraordinary one-man mission to raise money for charity is the subject of a new book, *African Brew Ha-Ha*, a Motorcycle Quest from Lancashire to Cape Town, which will be published on April 5 (Summersdale, £7.99).

It took him five months, and a lot of tea bags, to find that perfect cuppa, with no shortage of adventures along the way.

The great quest even earned him the acclaim of Aussie travel writer and fellow adventurer Peter Moore who says Alan “captures Africa to a - T.”

Alan, who trained as a journalist and now works as a self employed public relations consultant, is married to Olive, a South African, and tales of his exploits will now raise cash to support education and health projects in the shanty town of Imizamu Yethu in Hout Bay, Cape Town.

This is home to the workers at Original Tea Bag Designs, a project supported by Blackpool Sunrise Rotary Club, with all the products made out of used tea bags, the ultimate recycling.

Used tea bags are collected and dried in the African sun.

Then they are emptied of leaves, carefully ironed, and finally each tea bag is painstakingly painted.

The artists work mostly at home during these early phases so they can care for their families while they work. Sometimes the little ones help by emptying out tea leaves. The project was founded in 1999 and continues to be run by Jill Heyes.

Alan's wife Olive, a former president of the club, introduced fellow rotarians to the small township cooperative, bringing products, such as coasters, shopping bags, tealight holders, and trays, back to the UK, after countless visits there with her husband,

Graham Essex-Crosby, spokesman for the club, recalls: “The products were soon snapped up. Rotarians, together with Olive's friends and colleagues, also helped with the raw materials, saving their used tea bags to send to the project to make more products. So when Alan decided to make his epic trip he turned to us to help raise funds for charity projects in the township. Almost £4000 was



AFRICAN ODYSSEY: Alan Whelan with his motorbike and (inset) some friendly locals

# By land and tea

donated to charities to widen educational opportunities and develop employment.”

Alan says that tea-drinking is a ritual that binds people together throughout the world. His quest was to find the hidden heart of Africa, and sit down for a cuppa with the people who lived there.

The African Brew Ha-Ha (which is also the subject of a blog on [www.abhaha.com](http://www.abhaha.com)) was a 10-month project culminating in that solo bike journey. One man, one trusty (until he fried the clutch twice) 1981 Triumph Tiger motorbike, and many teabags...

He travelled through Morocco, Mauritania, and Mali, all the way to Cape Town, across deserts and some of the dustiest, near impassable, roads imaginable, as well as some of the most allegedly dangerous borders.

En route he met sporting legends and politicians, peacekeepers and outlaws – and

countless people who shared their last morsel of food with him. “On one occasion the people with whom I stayed had nothing so they went out foraging for wild oranges for me, and we sat down and shared those.

“Time and again I was touched by the generous spirit of these wonderful people who give you half of what they have.”

Armed with little more than blind optimism, he had the five of the most physically and emotionally challenging months of his life.

Alan lost two stone, had to push the bike for a fair proportion of the route, through mudland and desert, succeeded in breaking his collar bone twice, after an accident right on the Congo border, where he had swerved to avoid goats, ended up in hospital, but still got back on his bike, once both had been patched up, Alan by the medics, the bike by Lancashire's only Triumph dealer, Philip Youles of Blackburn, to continue his journey.

“Philip's the kind of guy who can dispatch a spare part pretty much anywhere in the world and ensure it gets there within three days,” he admits.

“Heaven knows how he does it.”

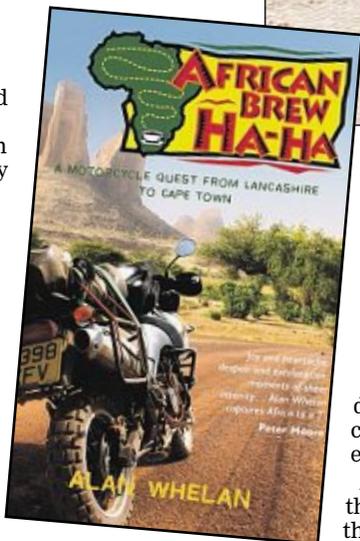
For Alan, the “stand out moments” were almost always associated with people. Now he faces rounds of public speaking engagements locally to raise awareness and more funds.

But hasn't it made him heartily sick of tea by now?

“No, I still love tea, And I still love biking too. A bike's the best form of transport for meeting people, and there couldn't be a friendlier way of making friends than over a cup of tea, no matter where you are in the world .

“What's more, I'm planning on going back. My wife will need something stronger than tea when I tell her...”

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**T**he four bowling greens on the Marine Gardens were, until the last few years, the area's pride and joy, a credit to the town.

The greens were in constant use, both for competitive bowling and for private enjoyment.

As a former secretary of the Fleetwood Bowling League I can categorically state that at least 10 teams used to play league matches at Marine Gardens in the 1980s.

That would amount to something like 110 regular bookings during the course of a season in the Fleetwood League alone.

This does not take account of teams playing in different local leagues who also used these greens.

As Mr Ali says, the annual Bowling Festival was also a major attrac-

## Livewire

A weekly look at the issue of the moment

### Bowling greens call

By Kenneth Hargreaves of Milton Street, Fleetwood

tion, drawing players and spectators from a large part of northern England and the Midlands.

Things began to deteriorate some years ago, and, far from being a source of pride,



**TOMORROW:** Jon Rhodes wants A Word In Your Ear



the greens became a cause for embarrassment.

I well remember some years ago that the winner of that year's festival made the comment that the green used in the final match

was the first he had known that included the equivalent of Becher's Brook.

There is no endemic lack of interest in the sport in our area. There are still the same bowling leagues in operations. There are still excellent private bowling clubs in action.

Many clubs no longer use the Marine Gardens but have transferred their activities elsewhere, the reason being the marked deterioration of both the greens and the greenside facilities.

The state of the greens has been appalling so it is hardly surprising that people do not support them as they once did. The council has cynically and systematically destroyed public demand to give itself the

opportunity of closing the service provided.

As a slight digression, the team for which I bowled until the last couple of years, played its home games on the adjacent greens at Belmont. There used to be two greens here. Now there is only one. Wyre Council was happy to take payment of our greenage fees for that season, but ceased to make any efforts to towards the upkeep of the green, and promptly closed it without any apparent consultation. This is not the only area of leisure services where this has happened. The Marine Hall possessed, until recently, arguably the finest real ale bar in North Fylde.

That too has been ruined in the interests of progress.