



RIDING FOR EDUCATION
Making a difference by horseback

press pack





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Riding For Education: Press Pack

"Riding for education developed in my mind over eighteen months ago now. Since that time it has become the passion of my life. At the age of 26, I can clearly see a way of directly affecting the people around me to better themselves in their lives. That's what makes me tick - thinking of ways to help others and now being in a position to do so."



What is Riding for Education

On 05 November 2004, Stephen McCutcheon, (26, UK) set off on an unsupported 10,000km ride by horseback and camel from Delhi (India) through Pakistan to Beijing (China). His ride is called "Riding for Education" (R4E).

The primary goal of R4E is to voluntarily raise £100,000 for the International development organization ActionAid International. All donations will be used by ActionAid International to open new schools and keep existing ones running for some of the poorest communities of each country.

As he rides Stephen is visiting real schools to show the world genuine stories from the road and prove the direct need for investment in education. Riding for Education supports Education for All, a UNESCO initiative that aims to ensure compulsory education for all children by 2015.

The importance of Education

Here are some facts maybe you didn't know. One in every two illiterate people live in South Asia (incl. India and Pakistan). In India, Pakistan and China alone, there are 600 million people who cannot read or write. Alongside Sub-Saharan Africa this region is the worst in the world. Children are often the innocent sufferers as they know no different.

The reality is grim. Today's Asia is an extremely competitive place and the gap between the rich and poor is rapidly increasing. Minority tribes, working children, women and disadvantaged social groups continue to be discriminated (especially in rural areas) because they lack the skills to compete.

Giving people an education gives them the key to their own lives and is a major factor in breaking the cycle of poverty because *they can now see beyond the life they lead*. Educate one child and you educate a community. This ride is about living one's dreams and creating them for others. [Reference link](#)



The Goals of the ride

1. To raise £100,000 from Overseas donors for ActionAid International who work in India, Pakistan and China. All money goes to supporting education projects in each country
2. Internationally to raise awareness about the reality of education across India, Pakistan and China by visiting real life schools and speaking with students, teachers and parents. To open people's eyes in as many languages, countries and cultures as possible.
3. To raise awareness about the needs of education nationwide in Pakistan by filming real life case studies through Pakistan.
4. To change perceptions overseas about the stereotypes of three great nations.
5. To produce a broadcast standard documentary for the international market on a ride from India to the high Chinese border in North Pakistan.

Why are you really riding a horse?

Three years ago I was an English teacher in the remote mountains of far Northern Nepal. It was meant to be a life changing experience and in many ways it was. I was excited and so were my students. My school was a small government run primary school catering to one hundred kids. Every day one girl brought her two goats to class and herds of cows would wander through our high altitude sanctuary. Yet life in the remote rural areas is hard. Students often lived and worked in their school clothes, as they were the only clothes they had.

The village had a bad reputation so regular paid Government teachers never showed up for work. Students were often needed to work at home, (particularly during the rice harvest), so many never realized the education they deserved. How do you turn up to school in the morning to a sea of happy smiling faces and then tell half to go home. You can't teach them all. A smiling face became a questioning one as again these kids received a slap in the face by the system. The school was the future of this village and these kids weren't stupid. The girls knew that as soon as they finished primary school there was little chance of going further. The boys knew that they were the hope of their people and how important it was to learn. But that's just it. These kids wanted to learn and no matter what I said or did, I couldn't help them all. [Reference link](#)

From Delhi to Beijing : the route



Crossing India – 05 Nov till 28 Nov 2004 ([India Reference Map](#))

Leaving Delhi with such a long journey ahead was the most nerve wracking experience of my life. Learning to ride a horse for the first time, battling 500kms up India's busiest road, meeting snake charmers, a village ruled by monkeys and narrowly avoiding disaster near the Pakistan border. Here are some highlights:

- Learning to ride a very patient mare for the first time called 'Rosie.'
- First time in modern history that anyone has ridden between the nuclear rivals of India and Pakistan.
- Beginning filming of the ride documentary with 25th Frame Productions of New Delhi.
- Press Conference. Departing from the symbolic 'Lahore Gate' at Delhi's Red fort and later riding through 'Delhi Gate' at Lahore Fort in Pakistan. Passing along a now extinct trade route.
- Encounters with wandering nomad tribes, snake charmers, a monkey village and a stay at the Hindu pilgrimage centre of Kurukshetra and in the Sikh city of Amritsar.
- Uproar on the Pakistan border. [Reference Link](#)



Pakistan to China – 03 Oct till 31 Dec 2005 ([Pakistan Reference Map](#))

Local education partners and Pakistan's national television channel helped R4E film ten schools along the route in a bid to directly publicize their efforts and needs across the nation. Although we completed this, the Earthquake changed everything.

Here are some highlights:

- Initial perceptions of Pakistan.
- Nine months in Pakistan, time in Afghanistan, Buzkushi and a visit to the highest polo tournament in the world.
- April 05 – Rosie gave birth to a surprise foal. Her caretaker in India was most surprised, less so than I was. The gestation period for a mare is 12 months! [Reference Link](#)
- Press Conference, followed by a fantastic send off from Lahore at a Gypsy school run by an organization called Godh. Godh was supported by ActionAid. [Reference Link](#)
- Partnerships with Strengthening Participatory Organisation (SPO) and Pakistan Television (PTV), Pakistan Tourism and Development Corporation (PTDC) and financial sponsorship from Premier Kufpec Pakistan B.V. (PKP). [Reference Link](#)
- 10,000 Rupees donation by blind children whilst leaving Lahore.
- Symbolic ride through Delhi Gate (Lahore).
- Ten schools filmed and visited across Pakistan from Lahore to the Chinese border. Each recommended by either SPO or ActionAid Pakistan. [Reference Link](#)
- On the 08 Oct 2005, an Earthquake struck Pakistan whilst we were filming a presentation at a Girls school only 100kms from Lahore. The mares felt it first and us second. Nothing was the same afterwards. [Reference Link](#)
- Difficult ride through the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, observing Rosa (fasting). Experiencing one of the profoundest moments of my short existence every day at 5.30pm when fast was broken by the Muezzins call echoing in every corner of the nation. [Reference Link](#)
- Ten days spent helping the relief effort in 'Azad Kashmir'. A different world of ruined lives, relief agencies and destruction. Uncertainty on the morality of continuing.
- Reception by the city of Jhelum at the Al Qasim Institute for Mentally Retarded Children.
- A sorrowful Eid-ul-Fitr in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad. Collecting donations for survivors.



- Riding through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. Staying at the tent cities near the epi-centre, interviewing the survivors and filming in the schools. A change in plans.
- Trotting through the remote outlaw region of Indus Kohistan in Pakistan's North West Frontier province. Being shocked and even dismayed at the misperception of a fascinating region.
- Saved by a brand new '21st Century horse shoe' presently being trialed on the ride.
- Adventures in selling two tired mares near the border. Exploring the fabled Hunza valley (home to the last descendants of Alexander the Great) high in the Karakorum Mountains. Crossing the Pakistan border by bus to Kashgar in far North West China.
[Reference Link](#)



Across China – Late May ([China Reference Map](#))

China is a new reality. The Southern Silk route that Stephen is following around the Taklamakan desert has been the most feared section for over 2000 years.. People are rare and water is rarer. It isn't something to take lightly.

Overview

Most of North China is that part of the World that has harrowed the Western mind for millennia. This is the area of vast deserts, camel caravans, intricate mountain ranges and the vast open grasslands of the nomadic hordes.



Kashgar lies in Xinjiang, China's largest and most remote province, on the edge of the Taklamakan desert. This desert is the second largest sand-shifting one in the world. To the North, South and West the Taklamakan is ringed by three of the world's mightiest mountain ranges. It's interior is nothing but a sea of dunes.

For millennia Silk road caravans have wound their way around the North or South of this arid monstrosity facing harassment from sandstorms, bandits, water loss and voices in the desert. Temperatures in the desert can peak to 45°C in the Summer and fall to -20°C in the Winter.

Exiting (or entering) the desert was always done through the famous Gansu (or Hexi) corridor over the Qilian Mountains to the East. This was the least difficult point and famously marked the beginning (or the end) of the Chinese empire. The Han Chinese have had a toll station at this bottleneck on the Jiuguan pass since as early as 2nd Century B.C. The Great Wall of China officially ends not far to the West.

The Gobi desert then disappears over the Eastern horizon onto the Mongolian Plateau. From it's harsh stony plains once sprang the greatest land empire ever created, the Mongol empire. Today the Gobi is still bordered by endless grasslands on which the nomads thrive. These extend the rest of the way to Beijing. [Reference Map](#)

Route across China

Stephen will begin the next leg of his journey from the Tajik town of Taxkorgan, lodged amidst the Pamirs to the West of the Taklamakan desert. His journey will cross the Pamirs and skirt the remote Southern edge of the barren region, diverting midway to follow the Altun Shan Mountains into the Tsaidam Marshes, roughly half way to Beijing. It's a route following in the footsteps of such venerable travellers as Marco Polo, the famed Buddhist monk Xuan Zang and [Major Clarence Dalrymple Bruce](#) (who along with "wild looking ruffians and 28 rugged ponies," battled from Srinagar to Beijing, across Tibet and the Chinese deserts in 1905). Peter Fleming also made this journey (albeit in the opposite direction). This is still a relatively unexplored region of the world. The wild Bactrian camel, wild ass and Argali sheep still roam the area and the dangers to the traveller are considerably higher.



Hoof, pad and foot will then make their way North through the famous Jade gate to Dunhuang, home of the world famous Mogao thousand Buddha caves. The Jade Gate also marks the end extremity of the Great Wall and this will accompany the ride into the maw of the Gobi and Inner Mongolia. The Gobi alternates between flat stony plain and open grassland for the final leg along the ancient caravan routes to Beijing.



Transport

Whereas the ride has relied on native horses to get this far, camels will now bear the main load from Taxkorgan to Beijing. Politics, geography notwithstanding, camels/horses will be sold and bought when available on route. The first camels will be from the Pamirs around Taxkorgan. A camel handler will accompany the journey for the first leg to Dunhuang. [Reference Link](#)

Permits

Kashgar Mountaineering Adventures are organising the relevant permits along the route. One of the trickiest areas will no doubt be Lop Nur region. [Reference Link](#)

Timings

The estimated duration of the journey is ten months and departure date will be around *July 2006*. Arrival in Beijing will be around Early Spring 2007,

Are you using any Special Equipment?

Stephen is trialing several pieces of equipment on this journey that a) will make life easier over difficult terrain and b) will be tested under the harshest conditions.

A 21st Century Horseshoe?

Imagine a horseshoe that you didn't have to nail to a horse's hoof. This is such a product. In late 2004, [Vettec Ltd \(USA\)](#) supplied R4E with an exciting new product called 'Superfast.' It's the perfect emergency shoe for remote locations and has incredible future potential.

Superfast is an adhesive gel that is applied to the bottom of a clean, unshod hoof in layers using an applicator gun. Three layers are usually enough to make a temporary 'shoe' for the horse. The product sets in 2.5 minutes and is popular with farriers because if a horse is lame, has hoof disease or other problems, nailing on an iron horseshoe may be next to impossible.

Horses need shoeing regularly and if done badly could result in a lame animal, which could prove fatal in a remote location. In this instance, Superfast gives Stephen the ability to shoe a horse until a farrier is found and gives Vettec the chance to see how the material performs through extreme environments: from snow to sand.

Dodgy horseshoes in North Pakistan gave Superfast it's first trial. Used on a riding mare, the product lasted 55kms before another layer was added. On the pack mare it lasted 40kms. It proved it's worth and got Stephen to the farrier in time. A full review of the trials will be posted after the ride has finished. [Reference Link](#)



The Silk Route on Horseback : The Documentary

Some journeys were only meant to happen once in a lifetime. Visualize what you've just read, remember the morals for which this ride stands and you have a truly amazing documentary.

The Riding for Education documentary has been filmed from the gates of Delhi, over the Punjab plains and across the Himalaya to the Pakistan-Chinese border at Sost. Producing the film are 25th Frame Productions of New Delhi, India who also organized the filming through India. In Pakistan, the filming was done through collaboration with Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV).

What are the goals of the film? To show the viewer a film that a) demonstrates the stern reality of educational need in three countries and b) takes them on a genuine adventure that they'll want to see again and again. The viewer has to be able to marvel with Stephen as the mountains role beneath him and smile with the warmth of the nomads who greet him to their homes.

Stephen's ride through India and Pakistan has already been filmed. A promotional disc is also available for the Indian leg. If you would like to request a free copy please contact 25th Frame Productions or Stephen McCutcheon as detailed below. [Reference Link](#)

Communicating with the world: www.r4e.org

Riding for Education has a website at <http://www.r4e.org> to keep the general public updated on a) the ride's progress, b) School visits and c) Donations raised. The website is the communications hub of the ride and is updated monthly or sooner depending on internet availability whilst riding. The public can also track the ride through a Newsletter mailed to their inbox.

The primary goal of the website is to encourage the general public to donate towards education online. A secure system has been co-ordinated with ActionAid to make this easy and safe. The site has an interactive 'Google' map of the ride, comments, Guestmap, Guestbook and information on how people can get more involved to raise money and meet R4E's goal of £100,000.

For the next stage of the ride across China, R4E is trying to procure a Satellite phone and solar charger to increase update frequency and provide improved information to the general public.

It is very important that media mention the website address in any article and state that donations are needed and how they can be made to this worthy cause.

How can people donate?

People can donate to Riding for Education either:

a) **Online** - Riding for Education uses the popular '[Just Giving](#)' donation service used by most charities to receive donations online. It is purposefully setup to provide a safe means of donating and it saves ActionAid money. This company is absolutely fantastic and it's reassuring to find a service that so many people use and trust. [Reference Link](#)



b) **Post** - Donor forms can be downloaded off the R4E website and posted to Helen Yeomans at ActionAid UK's office in London. Donor must write their names on the forms and cheques/money orders to have them printed on the R4E website. Alternatively sponsor forms can be requested from the physical address given below and passed out amongst friends, family and work colleagues. [Reference Link](#)

There are many ways people can help R4E, whether fundraising or simply linking to their blog/website or forwarding the R4E newsletter to friends. Full information and contact details about donating, linking and fundraising are given on the website. [Reference Link](#)

Who are ActionAid International?



Stephen came across ActionAid whilst researching education in North East India. The organisation was working with the Government to improve literacy across the area and was one of very few to do so. NE India is perhaps the nation's most unstable region.

ActionAid International work to ensure that everyone receives a fair chance in life. The organisation was founded in 1972 and have operations in 45 countries around the world. The organisation's programs in India, Pakistan and China are each completely different, run by local staff solving local issues. This means that R4E donations go to benefit local education where it's needed the most in each country.

In India, ActionAid has 14 offices around the country to better solve local issues. They partner with 300 organisations to affect the lives of 5 million people nationwide. That's the scale they work on. In both India and Pakistan, ActionAid is managing the running of the Commonwealth Education fund.

ActionAid Pakistan were instrumental in organising relief during the recent tragic Earthquake there. [Reference Link](#)



Who is Stephen McCutcheon?

Stephen McCutcheon is a 26 year old, young adventurer from the UK. After completing a degree in Commercial Management and Quantity Surveying at Loughborough University in 2001, Stephen left Britain to explore his dreams.

From the UK, Stephen spent eight months teaching English in the Nepalese Himalayas. It was the biggest life changing experience of his short life and inspired this journey. Since that time he's travelled through Nepal, Tibet, China, the Philippines, Australia, most of SE Asia, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan and now back to China.

Stephen enjoys tennis, trekking, mountain biking, and especially horse riding. He had a few lessons when he was thirteen, but that was it until he saddled up for a 10,000km journey to Beijing. It was a British architect on a bus in Burma that convinced him to undertake a different journey and following the Silk Road on horseback fell naturally into place.

“Riding on horseback through a foreign culture really opens your mind to the other's way of life. Although travelling is educational, this ride has forced me to appreciate the nitty gritty of people's lives as I approach a lifestyle similar to theirs. For me this is a personal journey of conquering my fears and having the accomplishment of a lifetime dream as I enter Beijing. We only have one short life and I hope this journey encourages others to experience the world at least once. I truly hope this ride helps. Enjoy.”

Sponsorships

Riding for Education is presently seeking further sponsorship for the Chinese crossing. All details are downloadable off the website in a sponsorship pack.

The ride is also seeking in kind donations for the following equipment: Gas Stove (accessories and pans), GPS receiver, Solar Charger, Satellite Phone, Dry bags, Slide transparency film and desert goggles.

Major supporters of the Riding for Education so far include:

The Pakistan Government, British High Commission (Islamabad), Premier Kufpec Pakistan Ltd. (PKP), UNESCO (Pakistan), ActionAid International, 25th Frame Productions, Pakistan Tourism & Development Corporation (PTDC), Pakistan Television Broadcasting Corporation (PTV), Strengthening Participatory Organisation (SPO), Vettec Ltd, Ranvet Ltd, McNett, Tekkeon, Lyon Equipment, Costa Del Mar, Sea to Summit & Nexus Technologies. Global Solar is confirming.



Making a difference by horseback - www.r4e.org

How can I contact r4e?

For any further details or queries regarding this ride, publicity or sponsorship please contact Stephen McCutcheon by:

Telephone: 00 86 1 3999634691

Email: steve@r4e.org
steveo7502@yahoo.co.uk

Sponsor forms can be requested from the following physical address:

17 Hillside Ave,
Bromley Cross,
Bolton, Lancs.
BL7 9NG
UNITED KINGDOM

For a more in depth view of Riding for Education please visit the website at www.r4e.org.

Further Information

The ride website now has over 200 high resolution photographs of the ride and route from Delhi into China. You are free to use any photograph(s) you wish from the gallery, as long as you **credit the photograph to www.r4e.org or Stephen McCutcheon.**

There is a [complete interactive map](#) of the route so far available on the website for easy reference. Individual country map routes are also available.

An [FAQ section](#), complete route information, Education across Asia and ride history are on the R4E website.

THANK YOU