

Wheels of Fortune

MORGAN PARKER

DETAILS HIS

25,000km



MOTORBIKE RIDE

THROUGH 10 COUNTRIES TO VISIT AND ASSIST

10 different charities



i

initially came up with the idea for Wheel2Wheel in 2008. It was a convergence of two things in my life: Charity, and the desire to undertake some kind of adventurous travel. On the charity side of things, I was very reactive – I'd go to charity balls or give to charity when asked – and over the period

2007-2009, I ended up giving more than 10 per cent of my annual income to different initiatives. The amount of money got so large that I figured, 'This can be done a little more strategically.' So I decided to go out and research charities and issues I felt passionately about in the Asia-Pacific region.

I was also at that point where I felt trapped

in the city life, and living in highly urbanised environments led me to feel as if I was being caged. I had this burning desire to take to the road and get out and see the world. I wanted to enjoy the freedom you enjoy when you're a kid.

In 2009 I decided to ride my bike from Hong Kong, where I'm currently based, through 10 countries, ending in my birthplace of Brisbane.



My two ideas came crashing together: this would be an expedition for charity, and I would stop in at one charity per country on my ride.

Wheel2Wheel was a chance for me to step out of everything I was finding distasteful – I'd been living an excessive, luxurious life – and also a way to create a platform for people to think of charity differently. I used to think it just meant giving money or volunteering but what I've done through Wheel2Wheel is shown that charity is a mindset and you can weave it into any experience in your life.

I ended up getting some volunteers to help out, and that research process I mentioned

earlier ended up taking 18 months, where we whittled down 360 charities to the final 10. The biggest takeaway was that, although money and volunteers are very important, the main things charities are looking for are awareness and for people to appreciate the issues they're tackling. Because there's so much noise in the media and such a proliferation of charities, it's easy to be dismissive of it. So, while the initial idea was to raise money, I thought Wheel2Wheel could undertake an awareness raising initiative – the ride could be turned into an event that could then be promoted. People were extremely interested in what I was doing – a corporate/ex-investment banker/real estate investor who was going to jump on a motorbike for charity; I didn't even know how to ride one at the time – and it picked up a following online.

Over 2009-2010, we became a proficient communicator of what these charities are about. What Wheel2Wheel is, is an augmentation of the capital and awareness raising apparatus of these charities. These organisations spend five-to-six months a year raising money for the next year, and that takes their eye off the ball and away from the reason they got involved with charity in the first place. The lack of marketing means they have to reach out to people, which also absorbs a lot of time.

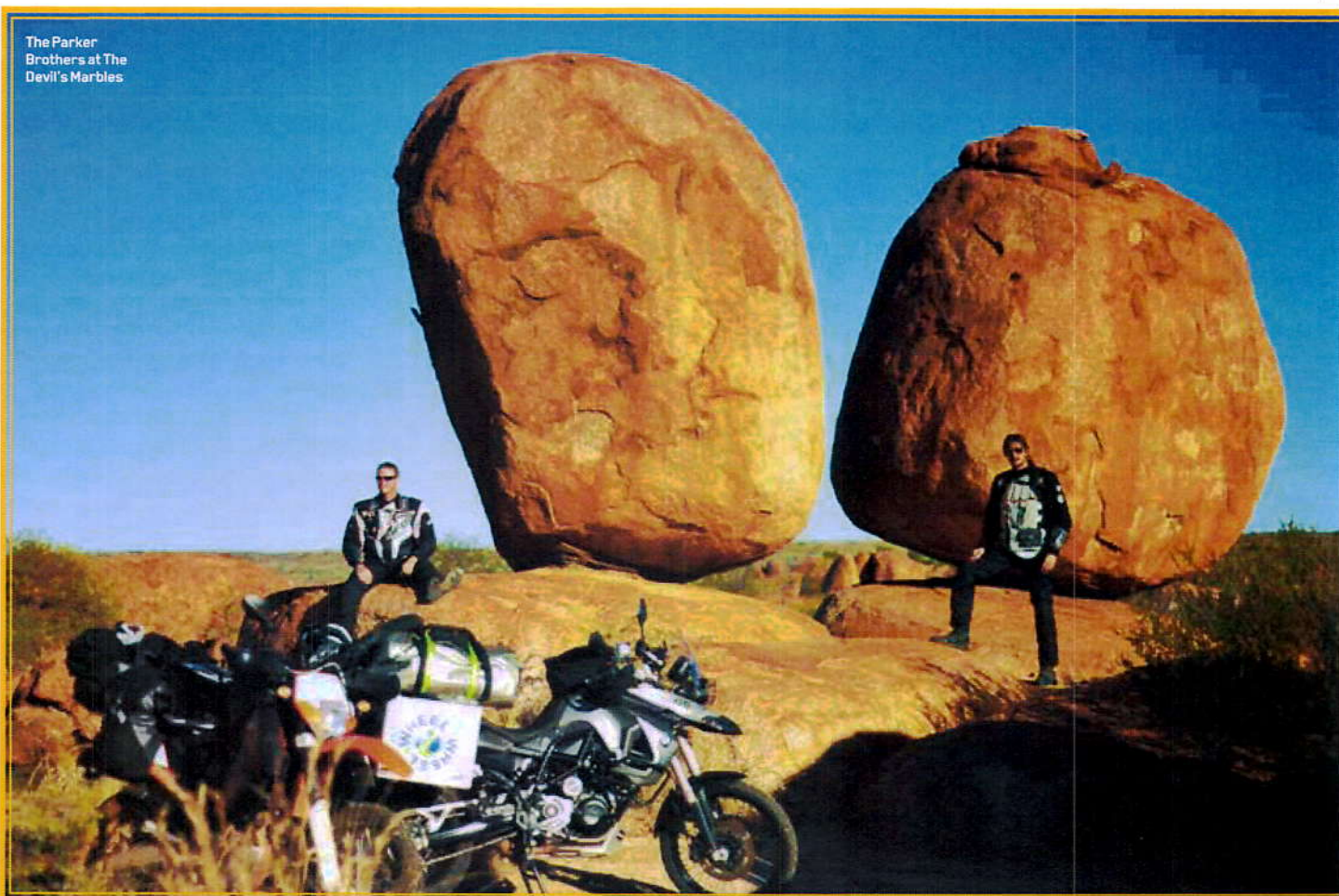
People get disillusioned with charity,

especially with the 'Where does the money go?' aspect. In our selection criteria, we looked at small, grassroots organisations, and we checked them out to see that they were effective and efficient. We compiled 18 months of quality research and a donor can look at that and can then donate with some level of confidence.

None of the 10 charities had ever been featured on TV and struggled to make it into the local media. If I was just a guy on a motorbike, nobody would watch that show. And if I just did a show about charities, nobody would watch that, either. But if you package them together, then these 10 different, interesting, untold stories make for compelling TV. It's an entertaining show that surreptitiously delivers a humanitarian tale.

I use the phrase 'Leveraged philanthropy'. The TV production has cost me \$US500,000 and you may think, 'Wow, that's a lot of money!' but think about it like this: I could've given each of these charities \$50,000 and then walked away. Instead, I've used that money to stage this big expedition – and a show off the back of that – and we've created a media value of millions for these organisations. Thinking more laterally and doing something for the charities, as opposed to giving to them, has created more benefit.

In March 2011, I began my journey...



The Parker Brothers at The Devil's Marbles

HONG KONG

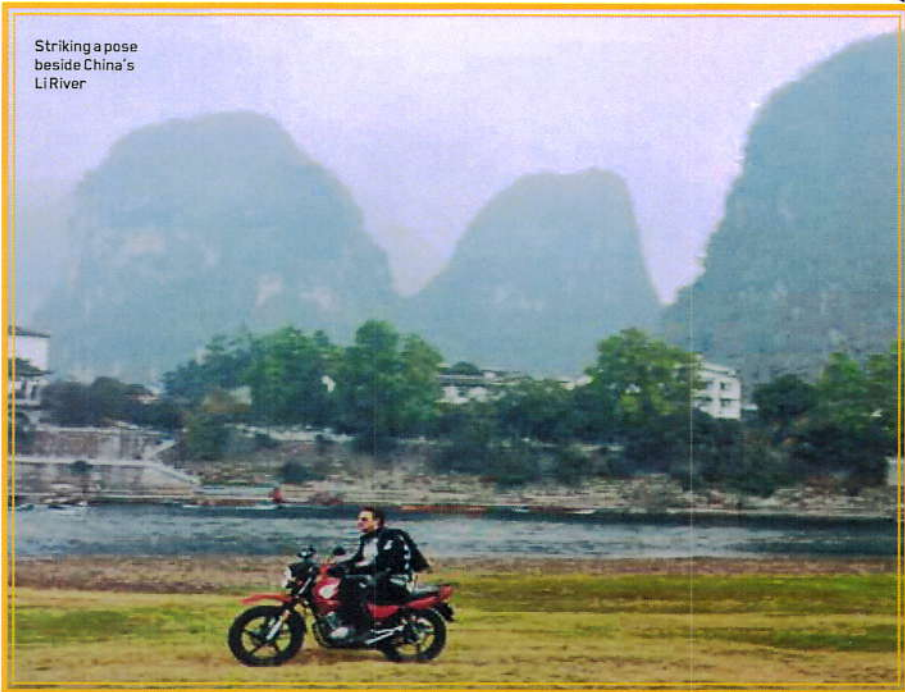
I live in Hong Kong, and the topic everyone talks about is air pollution. I found an organisation that was galvanising people against the government's inaction – they're essentially a lobby group but their approach is via education. The key statistic is that around 2,000 people a year are dying because of roadside air pollution. It's the biggest killer in Hong Kong and the government tries to keep it under wraps. Clean Air Network has brought the medical and educational organisations together, as well incorporating the public.

CHINA

The big issue is human rights but over the past 20 years, as it's become this economic powerhouse, the big loser in China is the environment. We focused on GECKO (Greenovate Environmental Challenge for Kids Outreach), which is providing environmental education to Chinese schoolchildren. The government owns and controls education – and none of the curriculum contains anything about the environment! So, after 12 years of schooling, hundreds of millions of Chinese students are graduating without any knowledge of even the most basic environmental principles.

And this is in a country that, in a decade or so, will be the world's biggest economy. The charity sends teachers into schools and, when we met them, they'd lectured 20,000 kids over a three-year period. Through our support, their curriculum has now been placed online.

Striking a pose beside China's Li River



VIETNAM

A slightly odd issue: the illegal milking of bear gall bladder bile from Moon bears, which are these big, black cuddly bears. In traditional Chinese medicine, people drink the gall bladder bile from these bears for its benefits. There's an organisation called Animals Asia that has

saved 350 bears over a 10-year period; there are some 3,000 bears out there being illegally farmed. They're squashed into these tiny cages with their flesh up against the bars – sometimes for up to 30 years – then they'll have their abdominal area cut open, a syringe stuck in, and the bile extracted. Once that's done, the wound is left open. It's a major physical and mental degradation of the animal. The medical fraternity is up in arms about it because there are 200 or so synthetic alternatives that provide the same medicinal benefits, minus the torture.

Bikes, bikes, bikes!

Vietnam has the most registered motorbikes in Asia. Riding through there is like being in a computer game – you're bumping off stuff left, right, and centre, and it's very intense.

Riding around was an incredible experience, especially because bikes over 250cc aren't permitted in Vietnam, so I needed special dispensation from the Minister of Transport. I started riding as a novice but after 25,000km through Asia, you tend to improve a bit!



My insurance policy is this big

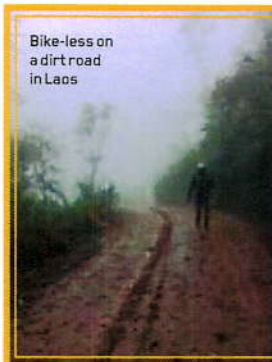
LAOS

Education is not readily available to impoverished people throughout Asia; rural areas in particular, where much of the poverty is concentrated. The mission of Child's Dream is to build schools where there are none. For instance, in remote regions of Laos, Burma, Cambodia, Thailand. They then hand them over to the government to manage. It's a very clever, efficient, and meek charity.

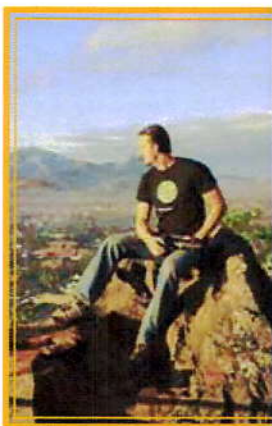
CAMBODIA

What sets New Hope apart from similar charities is that it was established by a local Khmer man (most NGOs [Non Government Organisations] and charities are started by foreigners). He came from a family of 12 and had little or no food growing up; they ate rats for survival. He managed to learn four languages by being a tuk-tuk driver, taking passengers back and forth to Angkor Wat. He

made some money from tips, ended up selling his tuk-tuk, and instead of spending the money on himself, he leased a piece of land, built a building, and offered education to local kids who weren't going to school. In order to get the kids to go to school, they had to convince the parents to let them do so, instead of sending them out to beg, which is a main source of income. Over five years it has developed into a charity that now also provides food, clothing, and medical care to kids and their extended families. It's a great story of the realities and practicalities of running a charity in Asia. You can't just come in with this idealistic notion – you need to adapt to the culture.

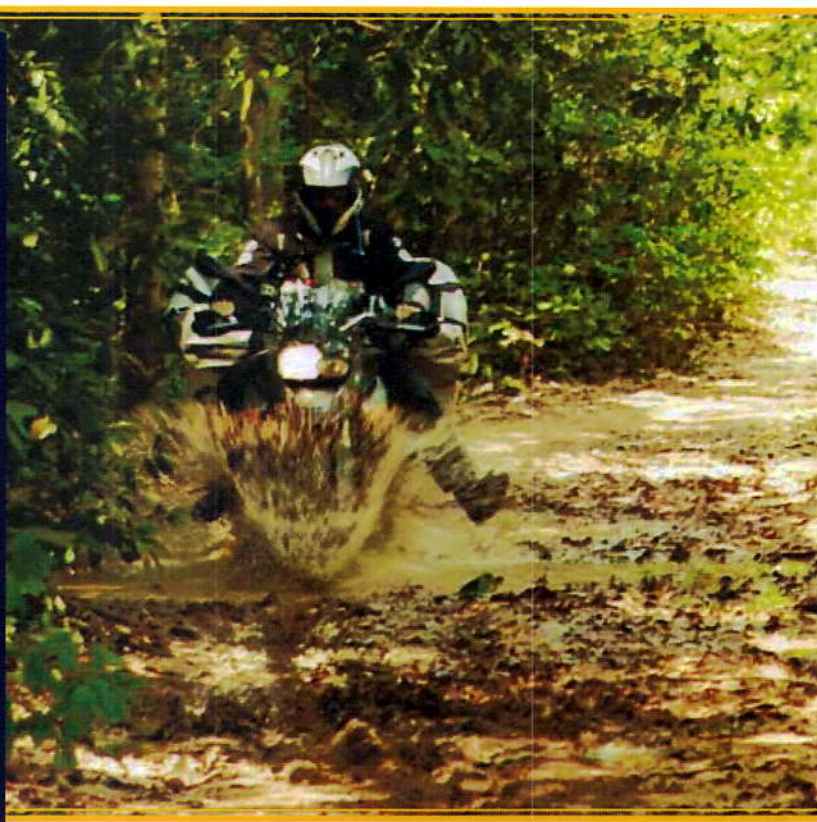


Bike-less on a dirt road in Laos



Stuck in the mud

Day 16 presented my first potentially game-changing moment. I was doing a 150km ride, at the end of which I was going to preside over the opening of a new Child's Dream school. It had been unseasonably raining for two weeks, so the dirt road had become a muddy mountain track. We undertook this ride up in the mountains – where the temperature was an unseasonal sub-zero – and the rain was coming in horizontally. Fifteen hours later we hadn't even made it, so we stopped and found a place to sleep. I got hypothermia and dropped the bike on 27 occasions.



THAILAND

Before I even started Wheel2Wheel I was fascinated by the HIV/AIDS issue. Initially, it the goal was educating people about prevention. Fast-forward a decade and the HIV/AIDS community were seeking to develop antiviral drugs and make them accessible. I wanted to look at this issue in a contemporary way and I found it at an HIV orphanage called Baan Gerda, just outside of Bangkok. What sets it apart is that they provide a home-stay environment for children born with HIV. There are families living on a campus, so

these children grow up in a typical family structure. The difference between this and other orphanages is that this isn't an institution – ordinarily, the parents of these kids would've died from AIDS or they'll just be handed off because the families don't want them, then they'll be thrown in a dorm and their lives will be screwed. This has beautiful surrounds, with school, art, music, sport. The biggest issue facing the world in terms of HIV/AIDS is the stigma these people carry throughout their lives. The illness restricts them from so many basic activities. Something I learnt was that if you're born with HIV and you take the medications on a daily basis, you can live a full life. I don't think many people know that. This charity gives them all the skills and support required to assimilate as if they didn't have HIV.

MALAYSIA

Globally, one-in-three women are confronted with some form of violence during their lives. In most cases it's someone they know, in a domestic situation. One US statistic states that every nine seconds a woman is being beaten. Nine seconds. What we showed in this episode, where we visited Women's Aid Organisation, is that this issue is universal, it is big, and nobody really talks about it. Men have an important role to play, which they aren't currently playing. In fact, the attitudes and behaviour of some guys – it's f—king incredible how bad it is.

INDONESIA

Indonesia ranks right up there in greenhouse gas emissions, which is a surprise, since it's not as industrialised as China or the US. The reason is the burning of forests and, more particularly, the oxidisation of peat. Peat is millions-of-years-old trees that have broken down into what feels like soil, and it's always submerged. It's the most concentrated form of carbon on the planet and the heaviest concentrations of it are in Sumatran swamps. Those swamps have a high level of biodiversity, as well as being the home of the majority of the world's orangutans. The government, despite legislation, has been issuing concessions to global palm oil plantation companies, who convert old growth forests and peat swamps to palm oil plantations. This is a largely unknown environmental issue and PanEco are in the jungles fighting for the survival of the forests and peat swamps. Just recently they had a major victory, where they were able to have a palm oil plantation concession rescinded. That's the first time that's happened.

EAST TIMOR

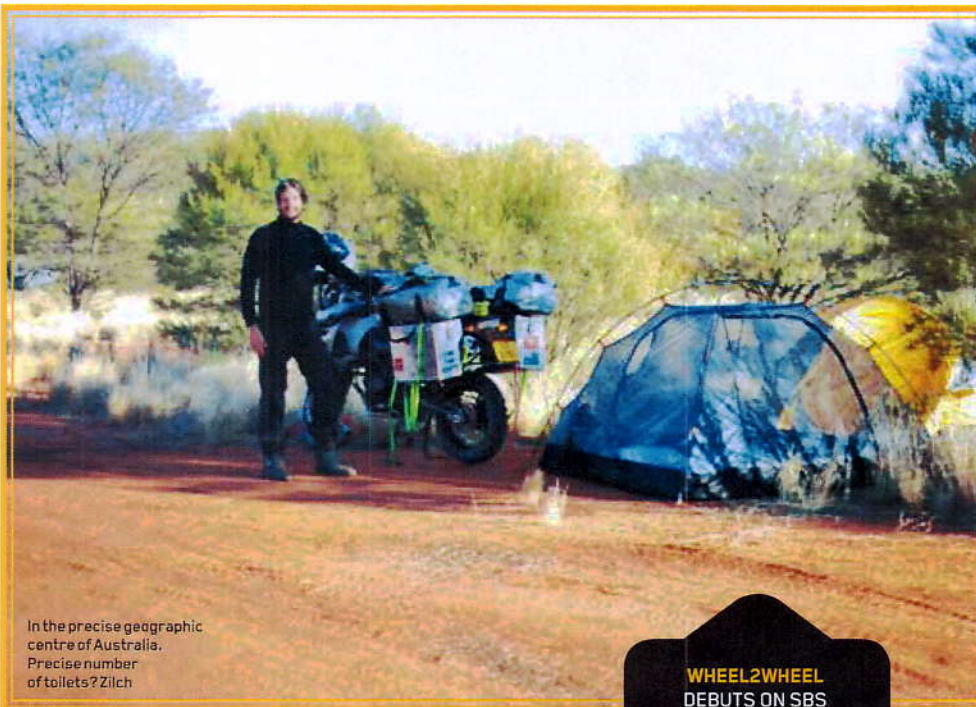
The first new nation of the 21st Century. Civil war followed a war of independence from Indonesia, so they've basically been at war for 10 or 15 years. It only ended a decade or so ago and, as a result of that sustained conflict, a generation of youths stopped going to school. Now that there's relative security, there are all these 25-year-olds sitting around with the education of a 15-year-old or younger. There's a local Timorese guy who recognised this, and the reason we chose Action For Change Foundation is because, like in Cambodia, it was formed by a savvy young local. Instead of opting to do something for himself, he opted to turn his attention to his fellow youths, who are not as fortunate as he. His objective is to provide vocational skills training. He can't give them a full education but he can give them skills to make them more employable and get them off the streets. At first he was met with, "F—k you. I'm not going there." So what he did was changed it to a sporting organisation. He got a soccer league together. Then a taekwondo league. Then a ping pong league. Over a period of time, once sport was over, he'd introduce them to this vocational skills training. If you're a member of them team, you've gotta learn to read and write and use a computer. He has an annual budget of \$30,000 and has over 550 students in this program.



BRISBANE

I decided to go for something twofold: redefine the way White Australia sees Aborigines and also introduce this population of people we have to Asians – most of whom have no idea that Australia even has an indigenous population. NAILSMA (North Australian Indigenous Land & Sea Management Alliance), is run by a really impressive, well-educated

Aboriginal guy. He's not bitter, he's not hung up on what the next government grant will be – he's focused on improving quality of life and finding a way for Aborigines to successfully live on the land. Like carbon trading, NAILSMA, together with its partners, have developed their own scheme: Using traditional conservation methods, like back burning, they assist gas and mining companies operating in the Top End with the environmental requirements they need to meet. In a niche way, this organisation is helping to foster an income for Aboriginal people by merely allowing them to do what they do naturally on their own land. Brilliant.



In the precise geographic centre of Australia. Precise number of toilets? Zilch

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