One Steppe Ahead

An expedition to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of Sir Charles Howard-Bury’s travels through the Tien Shan Mountains.

Kyrgyz soldiers travelling along the Kyrgyzstan steppe border China (Jamie Maddison, 2010)
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1. Introduction:

Commencing May 2013, One Steppe Ahead’s mission is to rediscover the original 2500km horseback journey taken by Anglo-Irish explorer, Sir Charles Howard-Bury, through Central Asia whilst highlighting the cultural, environmental and political changes that have taken place throughout this vast region since his own journey in 1913.

Mission statement:

Commencing May 2013, One Steppe Ahead’s mission is to rediscover the original 2500km horseback journey taken by Anglo-Irish explorer, Sir Charles Howard-Bury, through Central Asia whilst highlighting the cultural, environmental and political changes that have taken place throughout this vast region since his own journey in 1913.
Expedition objectives:

The overall objectives of One Steppe Ahead are:

- To rediscover Sir Charles Howard-Bury’s inspiring 2500km horse back journey through Central Asia.

- To turn the game hunting aspect of Charles’ original journey on its head by making the prime focus of our expedition the conservation of the Argali sheep that he once hunted.

- To document along the way the vast cultural, economic and environmental change that has transformed Central Asia over the course of the last century.

The conservation objectives of One Steppe Ahead are:

- To explore the Jungar Alatau mountain range of eastern Kazakhstan for evidence and sighting of the Argali sheep and to research the estimated population and distribution of the sheep within the region.

- To back up the sightings with precise GPS coordinates and provide other data for the benefit of conservation organisations and scientific research.

- To compare the findings of our Argali sheep research with the historical accounts written by Charles Howard-Bury in order to assess how the population size and threats they face may have changed over the last century.

Evening in the Central Kokshaal-Too range, Tien Shan, Kyrgyzstan (Jamie Maddison, 2010)
The wider aims that One Steppe Ahead hopes to achieve are:

- To highlight the impressive accomplishments of the great early 20th Century explorers, such as Charles, and to exemplify the importance of the spirit of adventure and exploration in the modern age.

- By recreating the entire expedition in all its original logistical complexities we hope to show how truly committing and immersive past exploration used to be and to highlight how the virtues of such slow travel can still be discovered and enjoyed in the present day.

- To provide an opportunity for the wider public to learn about Central Asia and to be inspired through gaining valuable knowledge and education from our expedition’s objectives relating to the conservation, cultural and geopolitical focus of One Steppe Ahead.

- To raise public awareness of the plight of the Argali sheep and to provide the initial research that may ultimately lead to the first independent research project in Kazakhstan.
During and upon return from our expedition we hope to achieve the following tangible goals:

- A documentary film on the expedition.
- A book accounting the journey.
- A wide collection of photographs from the journey.
- Public speaking to corporations, schools and organisations.
- An interactive educational/learning experience for students and schools.
Argali sheep conservation

The Argali sheep (Ovis Ammon) are characterised by their thick, outward spiraling horns and are the world’s largest species of wild sheep standing up to 135cm at the shoulder, measuring 200cm long and with a maximum weight of 216kg.

Despite their wide distribution throughout the alpine grasslands and semi-arid regions of Central Asia they are considered an endangered or threatened species. The primary threats the Argali sheep face range from over-hunting, poaching, competition and disease transmission from domestic sheep introduction and habitat loss.

Whilst on site in eastern Kazakhstan, One Steppe Ahead aims to investigate the population and distribution of Argali sheep, particularly within the Jungar Alatau mountains where Charles himself once visited to hunt these unique sheep. We are currently in contact with several eminent researchers in the field of Argali study who we expect will be instrumental in assisting us with conducting our research and contributing to the preservation of these creatures.
Team overview

Jamie and Matt met whilst on a climbing expedition to the Djangart region of Kyrgyzstan in 2010. Whilst in base camp, Jamie was first introduced to Sir Charles Howard-Bury through reading Marian Keaney’s account of his travels through the Tien Shan mountains in her book, ‘Mountains of Heaven’.

Although Charles has long since passed away, he will travel with us in spirit as we follow in his footsteps and come to understand more about who he was, the experiences he encountered along the way and how he has contributed to our modern day knowledge and understanding of culture, history, adventure and exploration.

Along with Charles, Jamie and Matt comprise a team capable and experienced in photography, filmmaking, climbing, journalism, public speaking and expedition planning.
Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Kenneth Howard-Bury (15 August 1881 - 20 September 1963) was originally a British soldier, who later became a noted explorer, botanist, philanthropist and Conservative politician.

He is most well-known for leading the first reconnaissance expedition to Mount Everest in 1921. However, he also completed a number of trips within the Eurasian continent during the early 20th Century, his most notable being his journey through the Tien Shan mountains.
Jamie Maddison is a freelance journalist and photographer with a passion for expeditions, adventure and outdoor reporting. His assignments have taken him far and wide; from the serene forests outside of Fontainebleau, to unexplored valleys in the Tien Shan Mountains, through to adventurous climbing in South Africa’s Cederberg Rocklands. His articles regularly appear in the UK national climbing magazine ‘Climber’ as well as a variety of other mountaineering publications and websites. Always willing to travel, no matter how remote or insecure the destination, Jamie is an ideal documenter for those keen and adventures souls intent on exploring lost and forgotten corners of the Earth, wherever they may lie.

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Jamie and Alpamys venture along the wide plains of Omengol during their training expedition in western Mongolia. Photo: Matthew Traver.
Matt Traver is a British-American national originally from Hong Kong. He is founder of Beast Products Ltd. – a caving equipment manufacturer. He has organised and lead expeditions to remote and little-explored areas including the Dragon’s Horns West Face on Tioman Island, Malaysia where he climbed a 1300ft new route on the imposing jungle spire. In 2010 he was the British leader for an expedition to the Djangart Region, a sub-range of the Kokshaal-Too mountains which borders Kyrgyzstan and China. The Anglo-American team was successful in climbing three new virgin peaks between 4800-5100m in height. Prior to their expedition only one previous peak had been climbed by a Russian team, subsequently this has encouraged new teams to visit the area for exploratory climbing purposes.

In 2012 and with a team of four he ventured to a remote region within the Arctic Circle of East Greenland to attempt first ascents in a previously unvisited area. In the same year he also completed a two week horse riding journey through western Mongolia documenting the lives of the Kazakh nomads and ancient practice of eagle hunting.
Located in County Offaly, in the very heart of Ireland, Charleville Castle is situated in Ireland’s most ancient and primordial oak woods and is the childhood home to Sir Charles Howard-Bury. It is currently run and maintained by the “Charleville Castle Heritage Trust” which was created in 1994. One Steppe Ahead is working with Dudley Stewart of the Trust, alongside Tim Lavery of the World Explorers Bureau, for fundraising and establishing an official launch and return event.

If you would like to find out more about the castle please visit: www.charlevillecastle.com
Departing from Charleville Castle, Ireland exactly one hundred years to the day, we will follow the original route taken by Charles Howard-Bury. Our journey will take us 15000km overland, through 20+ countries to complete this historical and grand circuit through the Eurasian Continent. In order to complete the trip we will utilise a mixture of trains, horseback, ferry and barge just as Charles did. Bicycles will be used between Almaty, Kazakhstan and Tashkent, Uzbekistan in order to make the numerous border crossings between these points more efficient.

Our journey:

Matt in Mongolia – photo: Jamie Maddison
Stage 1: Semey to Zharkent (40 days):

1. Semey to Sergiopol/Ayagoz, 340km
2. Sergiopol/Ayagoz to Lepsy via Tanshik and Lake Balkash, 230km
3. Lepsy to Kapal, 200km
4. Kapal to Kugalinsk, 300km
5. Kugalinsk to Zharkent, 40km
Stage 2: Jungar Alatau Horseback Journey (10 days)

Zharkent directly north over the Jungar Alatau range and into the Little Kustai, Big Kustai, Tekes, Jirgalan, Kinsu, Karagai Tash and Kurdai Valleys (horse), 200km—during our exploration of the Jungar Alatau we will travel over a number of high passes above 3000m, such as the Saryt in Pass and cross the Karatal River. Whilst rediscovering the areas visited by Howard-Bury, we also hope to venture into the remote NE sector of the Jungar Alatau bordering China (44.818864, 79.642639).
Stage 3: Across Southern Kazakhstan to Almaty (10 days):

1. Jungar Alatau to Ili River, 100km – via the Altyn Emel National Park and Kapshagai Reservoir.

2. Ili River to Almaty, 130km
Stage 4: Almaty to Tashkent, Uzbekistan via Kyrgyzstan (35 days):

1. Almaty to Tokmok border crossing, Kyrgyzstan, 300km - passing due north of Ile-Alatau, National Park, Kazakhstan
2. Tokmok to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 50km
3. Bishkek to Merke border crossing, Kazakhstan, 10km
4. Merke to Shymkent, Kazakhstan, 336km
5. Shymkent to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 135km
River fords

Crossing remote mountain regions

A few of the challenges we will face:

Desert and wild steppe

Long distance horseback riding
“The history of the land is the history of its people”

Kazakh proverb
Sponsorship and support

Our expedition represents a unique opportunity in public exposure for both companies and organisations. We therefore welcome any offer of assistance and in return we will provide you with:

- An extensive expedition report, with a specific mention of your assistance.
- Royalty free usage of any expedition photographs for media and publication purposes within your establishment.
- Long-term exposure of your support on our website with a direct link to your webpage.
- An opportunity for further exposure through any lectures, publications and films produced prior to the expedition.
- A complimentary round-up talk to those in your establishment may also be arranged upon your request.
- Bespoke publications and films to suit your specific needs.

The long road and vast open plains towards Koktal, Kazakhstan (Dewaele, 2009: http://tinyurl.com/3vz7oxe)
Western Mongolia | Riding with Eagle Hunters and Kazakh Nomads

In October/November 2012, Jamie and Matt completed an approximately 200km horseback ride in western Mongolia from Olgii to Altai and further into the back country near the border of China’s Xinjiang province.

The main purpose of the trip was to gain horse riding experience for One Steppe Ahead, as well as to meet Alpamys, our Mongol-Kazakh friend and third team mate who we hope will join us in eastern Kazakhstan. In addition to this our goal was to meet, travel and live with the Kazakh eagle hunters which inhabit western Mongolia, as well as to document their local way of life through film, photography and sound recordings.

A film and photos can be found on www.onesteppeahead.com