
GWR Claim Report: Longest Journey by Skateboard

Robert John Thomson
New Zealand

Claim ID #195888

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How to Use This Document

This document is best read on a PC on-screen using Microsoft Word. There are frequent hyperlinks included in the document that link to outside documents, namely information contained on my website, and to other media such as videos on Youtube.com and photographs on Flickr.com. Clicking on any of the hyperlinks will cause a separate internet browser window to load where information can be verified.

To open links, *Ctrl+left click* on the link you wish to view.

To make full use of the many hyperlinks, please ensure that your PC is connected to the internet.

Materials Attached

- Original witness signed logbooks
- Selected newspaper clippings

Section 1 - Journey Overview and Materials

This journey significantly raised the bar on long distance skateboard journeys. The journey was entirely solo and unsupported and pioneered never attempted before skateboard travel methods such as the skateboard trailer¹.

The journey consisted of three separate legs, each leg located on a separate continent. In order of sequence, the journey consisted of a European Leg, a North American Leg, and an Asian Leg. The total distance travelled overland by skateboard alone was 12,159km, and took one year, three months, and fourteen days to complete. Travel between continents was either by boat or by airplane.

1.01 Blog

Throughout the journey, I was updating my personal travel blog at www.14degrees.org with photos, video, and stories. This travel blog records my travels around the world not only by skateboard, but also by bicycle. On the 14degrees.org blog, journal coverage of my skateboard journey begins on [Day 325](#).

¹Explanation video - <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=3wJUd6nkoD8>

Throughout this Claim Report, I have made references to blog posts that highlight particular topics discussed.

1.02 Statistics

Total distance skateboarded: 12,159km

Wheels used: Three sets

Skateboard decks worn out: Three

Shoes worn out: Three pairs

Countries visited: Eleven

1.03 Recording Methods

GPS

For recording purposes, I used a Garmin Geko II GPS receiver. This compact GPS unit recorded average speeds, total distances, a running total of distance covered etc. This unit allowed for a digital 'bread-crumbs' trail to be recorded of my actual travelled route, however due to lack of access to suitable computers to which I could download the data to, I am missing some sections of route data from the GPS. My GPS unit only had around 500km worth of data capacity, before the old data was over-written by new data. All daily data was recorded by hand and displayed on my daily blog.

Those data logs that do exist, I have emailed to GWR Sports Records Manager Carlos Martinez in the GWR London Office.

PHOTOS

I was taking photographs throughout the journey by skateboard. I have collated about 60 photos from the journey that give a good representation of the journey. They can be found here: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/14degrees/sets/72157606152017432/>. Feel free to use any of these photos.

In addition to these photos there are about 2,000 others that can be found on my Flickr.com account here: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/14degrees/>.

VIDEO

Approximately every month I collated and edited video footage that I took during that month on the road. All footage was recorded on the 'movie' setting on my digital still camera at 640x480 resolution and 30fps. A list of edited footage can be found on my website here - http://www.14degrees.org/en/?page_id=73.

DAILY LOGBOOK

For those days that I did not have internet access at the end of the day, I recorded my daily mileage, road conditions, and other points of interest in a compact logbook. I have included these original logbooks with this report (sent to GWR). Included as part of the logbook format was a section for witnesses to sign.

1.04 Online Media Coverage

A selection of links to various online news stories about the journey (in addition to attached news clippings).

TELEVISION

- Oct 2008 – CambellLIVE (New Zealand) - <http://www.3news.co.nz/Video/CampbellLive/tabid/367/articleID/75963/cat/84/Default.aspx#video>
- Oct 2008 – TV3 National News (New Zealand) - <http://www.3news.co.nz/Video/National/tabid/309/articleID/74987/cat/64/Default.aspx#video>
- July 2008 - TV3 National News (New Zealand) - <http://www.3news.co.nz/Video/CampbellLive/tabid/367/articleID/63309/cat/84/Default.aspx>
- Feb 2008 – Fox 7 News, Texas, USA - <http://www.myfoxaustin.com/myfox/pages/Home/Detail;jsessionid=28F1774FFF7F99E1FA8A971B2F13870?contentId=5744415&version=1&locale=EN-US&layoutCode=VSTY&pageId=1.1.1&sflg=1>
- Jan 2008 – WAFB Channel 9 News, Louisiana, USA - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6aBJ0i7tA0E>
- December 2007 – Tampa Bay’s Channel 10 News, Florida, USA - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wlh3FOx8ASE>

PRINT

- [Christchurch Press, Christchurch, New Zealand](#) (November 2008)
- [Christchurch Press, Christchurch, New Zealand](#) (October 2008)
- [New Zealand Herald, New Zealand](#) (October 2008)

RADIO

- National Radio, New Zealand (November 2008) - [Recording here](#)
- National Radio, New Zealand (October 2008) - [Recording here](#)
- CallFM, Homestead, FL, USA (February 2008) - [MP3 Recording here](#)
- BrisbaneFM, Brisbane, Australia (January 2008)
- WestFM, Scotland (January 2008)
- 620WDAE Sports Animal, Tampa, FL, USA (December 2007)

1.05 Who is Rob Thomson?

I was born in Invercargill, New Zealand on the 12th of June 1980. I completed my schooling in Invercargill before moving to Christchurch, New Zealand to pursue a Bachelor’s degree in Japanese language at Canterbury University. Upon graduation with first class honours I moved to Japan in August 2003 to work as a Coordinator for International Relations in Amagase Town in southern Japan. I worked in Japan for

three years before embarking in July 2006 on a long-term solo 12,000km cycle tour that took me across 18 countries from Japan to Switzerland; across the Eurasian continent.

Upon arrival in Switzerland I changed my mode of transport from a bicycle to a skateboard, and on the 24th of June commenced skateboarding just over 12,000km across three continents. I now live in Christchurch, New Zealand.

1.06 The Board(s)

I began the journey on a *Rollsrolls* Carbon longboard. The original deck was replaced in England with another *Rollsrolls* Carbon deck due to stress fractures. The replacement *Rollsrolls* deck also developed stress fractures, and I replaced this with a wooden *Longboard Larry The Pusher* deck upon completion of the North American Leg of the journey.

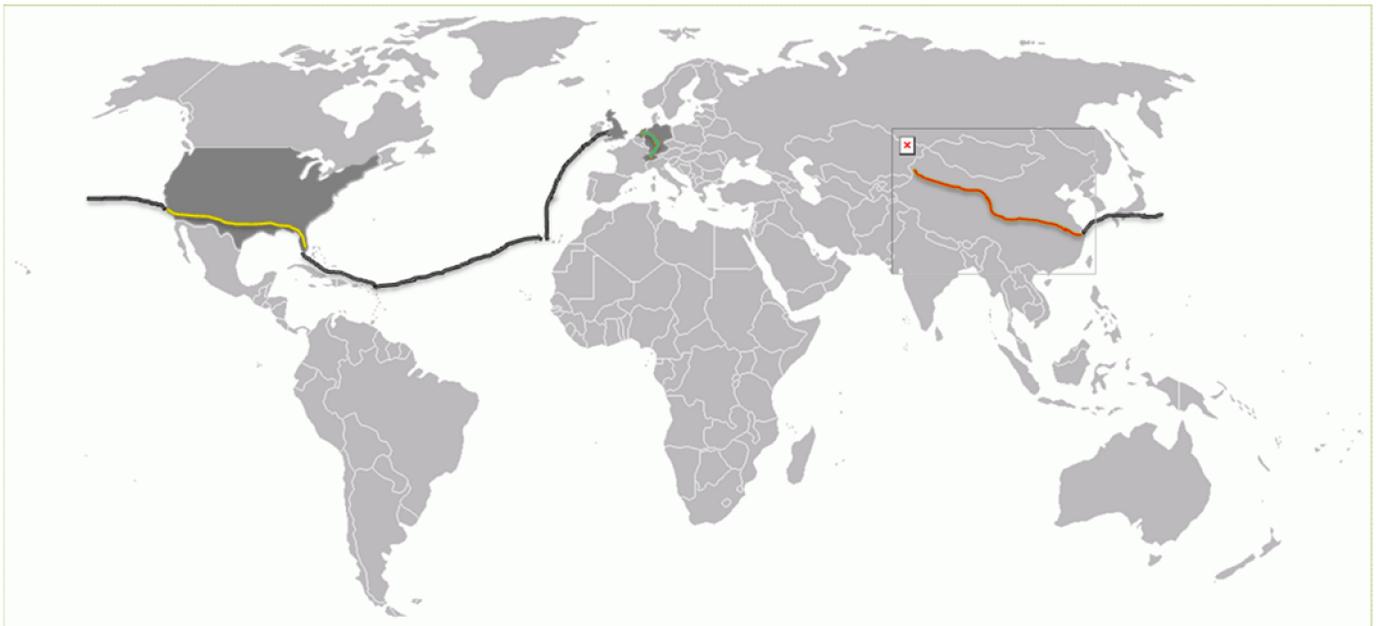
1.07 Skateboard Hardware Used

Trucks – I skated on standard *Holey Trucks* with Ruby Red bushings. The first pair lasted 10,000km before I replaced them in China.

Wheels – I skated 80% of the journey on *Abec 11 97mm Flywheels* (78a). From Gansu Province in China, I skated on *Seismic Speedvent* 85mm (79a) wheels.

Bearings – I used a combination of *Bones Swiss Ceramic* bearings and *Bones Swiss Six* bearings. With frequent cleaning, three sets of bearings lasted the entire journey.

1.08 Route



European Leg (in green)

Began in Leysin, Switzerland on the 24th June 2007. Travelled 1,541km through Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands, and England to end at Trafalgar Square, London, on the 4th Aug 2007. In my mind, this leg was to be the decider as to whether or not I would continue travelling by skateboard. If travelling by skateboard proved to be practical, I would continue on to North America. The result was, of course, that I felt it was sufficiently efficient enough to travel by skateboard, and therefore continued the journey.

Atlantic Crossing (in black)

Crossed the Atlantic Ocean by sailboat from the 14th Aug 2007 until the 7th Dec 2007, including time searching for crewing positions and time spent in Caribbean.

North American Leg (in yellow)

Began in Key West, Florida, United States on the 7th of December 2007. Travelled 5,529km across the continent, ending in Los Angeles, California on the 3rd of April 2008. The route began heading north through Florida, before turning westward at the Florida panhandle. Skateboarded across the US southern states of Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, Arizona and California.

Asian Leg (in orange)

Began in Khorghos, Xinjiang Province, China on the 27th April 2008. Travelled 5,462km west to east across China to Shanghai following China National Highway 312 for the most part, with some minor exceptions. Notable exceptions include a 500km detour through Qinghai Province on minor roads, and the final 200km approach to Shanghai, where a southern approach into the city was taken (China National Highway 315).

Arrived at People's Square, Shanghai, on the 28th of September 2008, thus bringing the journey to a close.

Section 2 – Timeline



Section 3 – Significant Breaks

This section outlines periods of ten days or more of no recorded skateboarding distances.

3.01 Atlantic Ocean Crossing

21 August 2007 – 19 September 2007

During this period, I did not do any skateboarding that contributed to my final recorded distance.

My skateboard was with me the entire time, and this period was spent getting across the Atlantic Ocean on a sailboat. After a two week search for crewing positions, I secured a deckhand position to crew for passage from Tenerife (Canary Islands) to Tortola (British Virgin Islands) on the delivery of a 42 foot sailing catamaran across the Atlantic, captained by Captain Steve Dewhurst of London.

I was flown from London to Tenerife by the crew agency.

See this link for an edited Youtube video of the trans-Atlantic passage - <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=OZ0i322SvFI>.

3.02 Caribbean Yacht Delivery

20 September 2007 – 7 October 2007

During this period, I did not do any skateboarding that contributed to my final recorded distance.

My skateboard was with me the entire time, and this period was spent assisting with the delivery of a 42DS Jeanneau sailing yacht from The Bahamas to the British Virgin Islands. This delivery was with the same captain and first mate as the trans-Atlantic delivery. My assistance on this delivery was an assumed obligation upon my acceptance of the position of deckhand for the trans-Atlantic delivery.

See this link for an edited Youtube video of this Caribbean yacht delivery - <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=UiYpwwiQUw>.

3.03 Waiting in the British Virgin Islands

7 October 2007 – 21 November 2007

After the Caribbean yacht delivery I spent this period of time searching for a yacht crewing position for passage from the British Virgin Islands to the United States. This period was longer than anticipated due to the low number of yachts being delivered north at that time of year.

During this time I worked for Horizon Yacht Charters and Moorings Yacht Charters in roles such as chef and boat cleaner.

3.04 Yacht Passage from the British Virgin Islands to Florida, United States

21 November 2007 – 6 December 2007

This period was spent crewing for passage on the delivery of sailing vessel Irish Jester II from Soper's Hole, the British Virgin Islands, to Key West, Florida, United States.

See this following link for a short video update halfway through this delivery - <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=yvLwxFnB5o>.

3.05 Stop in Los Angeles, California, United States

3 April 2008 – 13 April 2008

I arrived at my ultimate destination for the North American leg of the journey in Los Angeles, California, USA. Here I spent ten days organising equipment and logistics for the onward leg in Asia.

I stayed for ten days at Kirk and Donna Crawford's home in Redondo Beach. I knew Kirk and Donna through my blog, Kirk having followed my travels since I began travelling in July 2006.

3.06 Shanghai, China

15 April 2008 – 25 April 2008

After flying to Shanghai from Los Angeles, I stayed with friend and long distance cycle tourist Marija Kozin for ten days.

3.07 Shanshan, Xinjiang Province, China

22 May 2008 – 7 June 2008

I had only been skateboarding for three weeks in China before I succumbed to a serious bout of travellers' burnout. Accumulated stress due to travel visa restrictions, travel to and from Public Security Bureaus (for visa renewal applications), and of course the accumulated physical fatigue of travelling by skateboard in the scorching Gobi desert finally came to a head in the small town of Shanshan in Xinjiang Province.

Upon arrival in Shanshan I decided to halt all onward travel for seven days in order to recuperate. After those seven days, I was still experiencing burnout symptoms; anxiety, indigestion, insomnia. I extended the break in Shanshan for further seven days. I stayed at the Honghong Travel Inn on Highway G312 in Shanshan for the entire two weeks (14 days) I was in Shanshan.

In the second week of the break, I bought a DVD player for 10 Euro and hired cheap DVDs and watched them in my room at the inn. On June 6th, after 15 days resting, and feeling the pressure of my short 25 day visa extension, I travelled by taxi back to Turpan where I extended my visa again for another 30 days. I travelled by bus back to Shanshan from Turpan, and resumed skateboarding on the 8th of June.

3.08 Visa Renewal in Hong Kong²

4 July 2008 – 20 July 2008

Bureaucratically, the Asian leg of my journey was the most challenging of the three legs. The timing of the Asian Leg through China coincided with the lead-up and opening of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Visas for individual foreign travellers were limited to 30 days. Furthermore, these 30 days visas were only extendable up to two times (30 days each time) within China.

By the time I had arrived in Zhangye, a city in northern Gansu Province, there were only 8 days remaining on my second visa extension. Therefore I had to leave China entirely, and apply for a completely new visa *outside of the country* if I was to complete the Asian Leg of the journey.

To accomplish this, I travelled to Hong Kong by train, and applied for my new Chinese travel visa at the Chinese Embassy in Hong Kong. Including train travel from Zhangye to Hong Kong and back to Zhangye, this entire process took more than two weeks.

I arrived back in Zhangye on the 20th of July, and resumed skateboarding from where I had stopped on the 4th of July.

During my stay in Hong Kong I was interviewed via satellite by CampbellLIVE, a national news program in New Zealand. See the following link for footage - <http://www.3news.co.nz/Video/CampbellLive/tabid/367/articleID/63309/cat/84/Default.aspx>.

Section 4 – Exceptions in Mode of Transport

In principle, all overland transport was by skateboard. There were however some rare exceptions to this rule, as outlined below. The distance travelled via these means did not count towards the overall distance by skateboard.

4.01 Walking

There were certain road surfaces where skateboarding was impossible with my preferred skateboard setup. These surfaces were without exception rough, loose gravel due to road construction. Where ever possible, I would attempt to skateboard on the smoothest part of the road under construction, however this was not always possible. Furthermore, there were two particular occasions where I was forced to walk due to road access restrictions that did not allow for skateboards on the road.

The first occasion was during the North American Leg on the 30th of December 2008³ north of Inglis on Highway US19 in Florida, USA. Lack of shoulders and low

² Blog reference: [Day 711](#) to [Day 731](#)

³ Blog reference: [Day 528](#)

visibility on the busy separated 4-lane highway forced me to walk about 5km to a connecting road where I was able to pick up a safer alternative route.

The second occasion was also during the North American Leg. On the 24th of March 2008⁴ east of Quartzsite, Arizona on the limited access I-10 freeway I was pulled over by a State Trooper and asked to leave the highway. Lacking a nearby alternative route, I was forced to walk the remaining 10km to Quartzsite.

On all occasions when I was forced to walk, I turned my GPS unit off for the duration of the walking distance, turning it on only once I resumed skateboarding.

4.02 Driving

On the 25th of March 2008⁵, west of Quartzite in Arizona in the United States, I was forced to accept a ride in a private vehicle 15 miles from Quartzite to Ehrenburg due to freeway access restrictions on Interstate Highway 10.

4.03 Transport Between Legs

Between the European Leg and North American Leg (across the Atlantic), I travelled by airplane and sailboat⁶.

Between the North American Leg and the beginning of the Asian Leg I travelled by airplane, train, and bus. I flew from Los Angeles, United States, to Shanghai, China, before taking a train across China to the capital of Xinjiang Province, Urumqi. From Urumqi I took a bus to the border town called Khorgos, on the northwestern border with Kazakhstan. At Khorgos I started skateboarding back the way I had come; back towards Shanghai⁷. This was the beginning of the Asian Leg of the journey.

Section 5 - Claim Validation

Wherever possible, I would ask locals to sign my logbooks to attest to the fact that they had seen me travelling on my skateboard. I would also contact local media. However, due to certain conditions, this was not always possible on a daily basis. In this section, I outline notable lack of witness signatures and/or press coverage during my journey.

5.01 Lack of Witness Signatures and Press Coverage in China

WITNESS SIGNATURES

On average, I was only able to attain about one witness signature a week in China. This was due not only by my lack of Chinese language skills (to explain what I was doing), but also due to the fact that many of the rural Chinese that I met had not heard

⁴ Blog reference: [Day 612](#)

⁵ Blog reference: [Day 613](#)

⁶ See Section 3.01 to 3.04 for details

⁷ See following video for more details - <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=5Hec7yIRV0M>.

of the Guinness World Records. Those signatures that I did manage to get were from local Chinese I met who could speak English.

PRESS COVERAGE

Despite my skateboarding across China being the first ever crossing of China by skateboard, I did not receive any media coverage while I was in mainland China. I even went so far as to avoid media attention.

In China, I found that the rules governing where a foreigner can and cannot go, and what they can and cannot do, varied greatly. When I received my one-month tourist visa from the Chinese Embassy in Los Angeles I was told under no uncertain terms that I was not to skateboard between towns, as this is forbidden. Once I got to China however, I found that the local police had no issues with me being on the roads between towns.

Nonetheless, I avoided undue attention as much as possible while in mainland China, in the fear that bureaucracy might interfere with my journey.

OTHER SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

I believe that despite this lack of witness signatures and press coverage, it is beyond reasonable doubt that I did indeed travel across China entirely by skateboard.

- **Blog Updates**

There is a blog entry for every single day I was on the road in China, complete with photographs. Blog coverage of the Asia Leg of the journey begins on [Day 625](#) on the 14degrees travel blog.

- **Video Updates**

Throughout the skate across China, I uploaded regular video footage updates. These were filmed and edited by me on the road.

- Video Update #5 - <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=5Hec7yIRV0M>
- Video Update #6 - http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=h_VaR4aoCSs
- Video Update #7 - <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=OpJMcWQRLjg>
- Video Update #8 - <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=JzBujRmo1Y4>
- Video Update #9 - <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=DJzHOkEXXA>
- Video Update #10 - <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=O36qc1ufk9o>

- **Third-party Blog References**

During the skate across China, I met other travellers who not only signed my logbooks, but also made references to me in their own travel blogs.

- Christian ROBIN
<http://parispekinavelo.blogspot.com/2008/07/lanzhou.html>
- Lemon
<http://freelife4me.blog.sohu.com/96585809.html>
- Lost Laowai
<http://www.lostlaowai.com/blog/2008/10/04/skateboarding-from-switzerland-to-shanghai/>

5.02 Lack of Witness Signatures and Press Coverage in Europe

I set out from Leysin, Switzerland, with the intention to skateboard through Europe to England. At that stage, I was not yet sure whether I would continue on to skateboard across North America. In a sense, the European Leg was a ‘feasibility study’ to see if it was going to be efficient enough to travel on my own on a skateboard.

My only mode of transport during the European Leg was skateboard, although at that stage I had not yet honed techniques for recording my daily mileage. I had also not yet created a logbook for witnesses to sign. Furthermore, due to my uncertainty as to whether I would carry on to North America, I was not prepared to approach news media about my story, hence the lack of media coverage in Europe.

Therefore, my supporting evidence for the European Leg takes the form of blog entries, photographs, and video.

Blog updates

I have a blog entry for every single day I was on the road in Europe including photos, beginning at [Day 325](#).

Video Updates

I was still experimenting with the video update format I would use for the rest of the journey, however I uploaded a number of video updates during the European Leg.

- Video list from Europe on my website - http://www.14degrees.org/en/?page_id=724.

Section 6 - Technology Pioneered

No solo and unsupported long distance tour (5,000km plus) by skateboard has ever been recorded. Therefore there were many challenges I faced. I had no support car to carry water, food, or extra pairs of shoes. There was no support car trailing me to alert other drivers of my presence on the road. The following are a selection of ideas that I tried in order to make the task more manageable. Some were a success, some were a failure.

For more examples, please refer to the Gear That Worked

(http://www.14degrees.org/en/?page_id=709) or Gear That Didn’t Work

(http://www.14degrees.org/en/?page_id=710) sections of the 14degrees website.

6.01 - Skateboard Trailer (SUCCESS)

For the European Leg and the North American Leg of the journey, I was carrying all my equipment on my back in a 45-litre backpack. This backpack contained everything I needed to be self-sufficient; tent, sleeping bag, food, water, first-aid kit, etc⁸.

⁸ See Gear List on 14degrees website for full list of equipment - http://www.14degrees.org/en/?page_id=10.

This arrangement was bearable, because the longest distance I had to travel between services during these two legs was at the most 100km. This distance could be covered one day.

However, due to anticipated two-day stretches between services in western China, I had to explore the option of pulling a trailer. This way I would be able to effectively carry the required amount of water and food for those two days.

With the assistance of *Longboard Larry* in the US, a suitable hitch mechanism was developed, and I was able to use an old skateboard as the trailer, while pulling it using a new board from *Longboard Larry*.



6.02 – Skateboard Speedometer (FAILURE)

I saw this as a cheap alternative to buying a full-blown GPS unit for recording my speed and distance data. Great idea which actually worked, but had the following fatal flaws:

- Due to the small wheel size, the computer would max out at 35km/h. Anything faster than that, and the unit would not register any higher. Guessing this is due to the magnet passing the sensor too quickly.
- Vibrations from the road killed the computer unit within about three days of use.



6.03 – Parachute Air-Brake (FAILURE)

I made this device out of a lightweight nylon hammock, with the hope of using it as an effective way to slow myself down on long downhills. The idea was that this would save on wear on my shoe soles, because I would not have to foot brake as much. The reality was that the parachute only worked/was practical under the most perfect conditions. That is, there must be not even a hint of a tailwind, the road must be free from traffic (it surprised drivers), and the road



surface had to be perfectly smooth (very hard to balance while straining to keep the parachute level). Also, it took time to roll the thing back up again and store it. Needless to say, in the end I got sick of carrying it and never getting the perfect conditions to deploy it safely. It got chucked in Austin, Texas.

Section 7 - What Next?

SPEAKING

I am now involved in motivational and inspirational speaking engagements for audiences ranging from primary school to corporate.

BOOK

I am writing a book about my travels, tentatively entitled *Boarderline*, to be on shelves by Christmas 2009.