

## Driving with CARE

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Staff Reporter



**OVERLAND AND UNDERWATER:** Alex and Maz Towns and Martin Pitwood are travelling the globe from the UK to New Zealand via 26 countries to raise funds for CARE International.

"PEOPLE tell us that we're mad," says Martin Pitwood with a chuckle.

There have been moments, in the past two years of planning, that he and his two travelling companions, Alex and Maz Towns, have tended to agree.

The three, all in their early 30s and who hail from Guildford in the UK, are travelling in specially-adapted 4 x 4 vehicles from London to Christchurch in New Zealand, over a maximum overland route, with a scheduled arrival date of February 2007. Not just a jaunt, the journey, dubbed "Overland and Underwater" is raising funds for CARE, the international humanitarian aid organisation.

Interviewed by The Sofia Echo at the British Residence in Sofia, where they were the guests of UK ambassadorial couple Jeremy and Katie Hill, the team described the plans for their 65 000 km, 26-country visit.

Their route follows an almost 180 degree trajectory around the globe. Bulgaria is the eighth country they have passed through since leaving London in early August. They were headed, after a visit to some of Bulgaria's choicest diving sites on the Black Sea – all three are keen divers, hence the title of the trip – on to Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Egypt, where they will visit a CARE project on water management.

Then on to Iran "one of the more challenging countries," smiled Pitwood, after that Pakistan – "again, interesting" – and into India, where they will visit CARE projects on micro-financing. From there, they head north into the Himalayas, to Nepal, and China.

Organising the China leg had been a "logistical nightmare", Pitwood said. "They're not so keen about a bunch of foreigners driving around their country, so we shall have an official escort 24/7." After China comes Laos, Thailand, Philippines, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, arrival in Australia – where the country's extremely strict quarantine laws will require the two cars to be "spotlessly clean inside and out" – and then a route following the Australian coast, and then a ship journey to New Zealand.

The journey is being funded out of their savings, and Pitwood, an electronics engineer, Alex, a software consultant, and Maz, a pharmaceutical researcher, have all resigned their jobs.

The group – who later will have a fourth member – make up their own travelling headquarters, and are keeping in touch by satellite phone with family and friends. Their diving background has given them some medical training, and they have travel and evacuation insurance. They notified all embassies in London of the countries they are travelling through, as well as all the British diplomatic representatives along the route. They are grateful for the enthusiasm shown by the overwhelming majority for the trip. They have also had flyers printed in several languages (among them Bulgarian) to show police and other authorities, explaining the trip. The Bulgarian police who had stopped them had without exception sent them on their way with smiles and good wishes, they said.

Their target is to raise 25 000 pounds for CARE – by the time they had reached Sofia, they had achieved more than 6000 pounds. They also hope to raise funds to pay for the planting of trees to the equivalent of those that will be destroyed by the impact of the diesel fuel they will be using on the trip. For more information, visit [www.overland-underwater.com](http://www.overland-underwater.com) and [www.care.org](http://www.care.org).