



John Pilkington Event 23rd October 2012

A very successful fundraising supper was held at Bangkok Brasserie on Tuesday 23rd October when John Pilkington provided an enthralling illustrated talk about the journey he took last year from Georgia to Afghanistan.

In an exciting sequel to his previous talk, A Stroll through the Axis of Evil, John described in his presentation of photographs how he followed a spectacular branch of the Silk Road from the Caucasus across the Caspian Sea to Samarkand. Turning south-east to explore the High Pamirs of Tajikistan and Afghanistan; a region well-known to Marco Polo, before finishing in Kashgar - regarded as China's 'Crossroads of Asia'. His stunning photos and informative commentary enthralled the audience. John's passion and enthusiasm meant that everyone listening was living the excitement and challenges of his journey which took 5 months to complete. "Afghanistan was an absolute highlight. Crossing the river from Tajikistan was like stepping back a hundred years. On the Tajik side there were cars, electric lights, piped water and central heating; on the Afghan side donkeys, candles, water buckets and smoky yak-dung fires. In the company of two horsemen I reached the source of the River Oxus, helped along by generous bowls of yak's-milk yogurt and salty tea, the staple diet of the sheep and yak herders in this isolated corner of Afghanistan".

The event was in aid of The Friends of H.O.P.E - a small UK registered charity based in Winchester, working to help the rural poor in India, in the Nilgiri Hills region of Tamil Nadu. The event raised £900 for the charity and all of the money is to be sent to India to help families and communities build sustainable livelihoods.

More information about the work of The Friends of H.O.P.E can be obtained from;

David Pople

Trustee

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Note for editors:

The charity's story began some 17 years ago when Vanya Orr gave up her life in Winchester and decided to help the villagers in the tiny village of Cinchona, near the Doddabetta Peak and where Vanya's family had colonial roots. The villagers had fallen at Vanya's feet begging her to try and help for no-one had work, no-one had a solid roof over their heads and the witch-doctor had been called upon to drive away 'evil forces'. Vanya's subsequent work was nothing short of a miracle in the eyes of the Cinchona community and set the scene for the creation of an NGO called the Earth Trust and which was, and continues to be, funded by The Friends of H.O.P.E. Some 100 villages have now benefitted since our work began, that's about 20-30,000 tribes people living at or below the Indian poverty line. David Pople explained in his introduction that a farmer commits suicide in India every 30 minutes and in the last 12 years some 250,000 farmer suicides have been recorded, with a number unrecorded.

The Friends of H.O.P.E (which stands for health of people and the environment) through The Earth Trust provide help to the tribal poor by training farmers and women self-help groups in bio-dynamic organic farming methods (where we have a nursery model); we train key village women in primary health care, provide counselling and therapies and teach the village women how to make herbal medicines. We also teach the children in the poorest schools about the environment and how to grow organic vegetables to improve their nutrition...David told two stories – one involving a boy called Sri Ram who was always absconding from school, and when he was in school his mind was never on his studies. Then one day the staff at his school decided to go and find him and they found him tending a wondrous vegetable garden, Sri Ram explained that he lived with his grandmother and that grandfather had died and so through what we had taught him about the importance of nutritious vegetables for good health and in combatting disease, he had decided that he wanted to provide his grandmother with vegetables so that she could continue to work on her local tea estate and not be evicted from her home. To illustrate what could be achieved by the children, David explained that Thenali School had produced cauliflowers where one weighed a record 5.7kgs! Where Jayalakhsmi, one of our outreach team, had been on the spot when a baby had been badly burned by boiling water from knuckles to shoulder and where she had extracted the pulp from the Aloe Vera plant, smothered the child's arm with the pulp and cover with a clean rag - within 10 days the wound had completely healed – not even the slightest evidence of the scalding.