



Waikato graduate adventurers put can-do attitude to the test

Three University of Waikato graduates are poised to take on the world – by motorbike.

Law graduates Rob Gray and Rob Climo have joined forces with Waikato management grad Mike Jacobson and two friends, Tom Anselmi and Misha Kravcenko, to complete a 25,000 kilometre motorbike journey from Vladivostok to London.

The trip, which they're calling the 51st Traverse, has been two years in the planning and will take them from the Russian Far East through Mongolia and Central Asia, across Turkey and southern Europe, and up through France. They plan to start the ride in April and travel through the Northern Hemisphere summer, reaching London some time in October.

As well as seeking sponsorship for the ride, they're aiming to raise a dollar for every kilometre they travel to help build a shelter for street children in Vladivostok. It's part of a project set up by New Zealander Rachel Hughes who runs a charity there called Living Hope.

Rob Gray, who currently works at leading law firm Russell McVeagh in Auckland, first came across the plight of the street children when he took the long way home through Russia and Mongolia after a three month student exchange at the University of Copenhagen in his final year at Waikato.

"I spent a week in Siberia with friends there, and got the chance to come down into the basements where these kids live, and I was just blown away," he says. "There were kids with AIDS in miserable, filthy conditions, but there was also a teenage girl with a baby sitting on a pile of rags still trying to make herself beautiful for our visit by splashing on perfume."

Mike Jacobson, who's now a sales and marketing consultant with Auckland-based company Business Mechanix, also has some globetrotting already under his belt – in his previous job he travelled all round the world as sales manager for that Kiwi icon Buzzy Bee, which is distributed by Pukekohe-based Brightway Products.

"The Waikato Bachelor of Management Studies degree requires you to do a practical investigation – the 499 – and I did mine with Brightway," says Jacobson. "I looked at the drivers to taking a small New Zealand business like Brightway global, and when I graduated they offered me a job."

Jacobson and Gray are both former Pukekohe High School students, and both chose Waikato for its campus location and relaxed, down-to-earth feel.

Climo is also from a small town, and left Kerikeri High School in the middle of his final year to study law and social sciences at Waikato. "I met a student recruiter from Waikato who ended up coming back to our place for dinner with my parents, and she convinced me to go to Waikato," he says.

"The opportunity to start university immediately was just too tempting, so I packed up my room on Friday, said goodbye to everyone on Saturday, drove down on Sunday and started class on Monday."

Climo now works at another top Auckland law firm, Buddle Findlay, just across the road from Gray. The two originally met on the Copenhagen university exchange in their final year at

Waikato. "We got on like a house on fire, and did the same crazy travel through Eastern Europe," says Climo.

"Coming up with the idea for this crazy trip is just a continuation of the travel we did together. We figured we're 25 years old and have got the taste for travel, and although it's going to be testing, it's nice to feel we can make a difference to these street kids."

The team has secured sponsorship from Suzuki in the form of five motorbikes, and Climo says they are already receiving donations for the Living Hope charity via the 51st Traverse website. "We're now getting donations from people we don't know, from Vladivostok to Dubai!"

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