# Bricklane to Bangladesh

ANUSHAY HOSSAIN



Luke and Tom are welcomed to Bangladesh by an army of BD Cyclists.

Luke Barton and Tom Smith, two young men in their late twenties, from the United Kingdom, have recently made the news. They decided to embark on an epic adventure cycling half way across the world largely unsupported, from London's famous Bricklane Bangladeshi neighbourhood in East London to Bangladesh.

Although this seems like a random choice, influences from Bangladesh were always present in the men's lives, especially Luke who grew up near Brick Lane, and was surrounded by London's vibrant Bangladeshi community during his childhood.

Mishal Karim and Samuel Bretzfield, both co-founders of BGLOBAL, a leading technology company came across the BLTB website and reached out to Luke and Tom before eventually deciding to sponsor the initiative. Mishal and Sam knew they had found the perfect platform to raise awareness and funds for the Noor E. Farid Nasrine Academy, a project that supports twenty underprivileged boys located in Comilla. It is supported by BGLOBAL and personally managed by Mishal.

Luke and Tom began their journey on 14th June 2013 from Brick Lane. Naturally they were a bit anxious. "In retrospect, aside from a few 35km practice bike rides we really had no idea how ill-equipped we were for what lay ahead of us," Luke describes. "There were times when only our sense of British pride kept us going forward."

It took two days to reach Dover and cross the English Channel, which was meant to be the only time Luke and Tom left land. At the beginning of the journey, both Tom and Luke lacked the fitness level to keep up the pace they had set for themselves and were forced to sleep on open ground through rain and storms on certain nights because they hadn't been able to reach the next city or town. They cycled through France, and even accidentally crossed in to Chinmay in Belgium at one point, but eventually reached Strasbourg.

From Starsbourg, they decided that they were not equipped to tackle the Alps, so the two friends rerouted through Germany following the Danube, which flows through much of Europe. They crossed through Austria, Bratislava and finally Hungary. Luke and Tom stopped in Budapest for a few days until their next stop in Serbia, the first time they needed their passports. They managed to cycle from Belgrade to Istanbul in ten days, crossing Bulgaria.

"Istanbul was a beautiful city seeped with history," says Luke, acknowledging that the roads were the most dangerous they encountered until that point of the trip. "The terrain of Turkey was very undulating, and we were examining maps since there was no easy way through," Luke continues.

Although the plan was to cycle through Iran, due to the elections that were taking place in the country, visas were not being approved so they found another route to bring them to Georgia, which was the last destination that seemed remotely European.

Now Luke and Tom had to mentally prepare for the toughest part of their journey- crossing Central Asia. "There were vastly varying landscapes along the Pamir Highway including high altitude deserts, plateau plains, mountains and valleys," Luke explains.

"At one point in Khalikhum, I was dehydrated and needed to be hospitalized for three days," adds Tom. "The weather conditions were difficult, we faced sand storms, temperatures were very hot during the day in the plateau areas, and dropped below zero in higher altitude location at night."