

## Fiona Reports on Cycling in Vietnam

Cycling 300 miles in 6 days was a different sort of challenge to climbing the Andes, but a challenge none-the-less. 13 stalwarts left Heathrow on February 11<sup>th</sup> for the long flight to Hanoi and on to



Danang in Northern Vietnam. After bike fitting and the even more important fitting of my own saddle, we set off for a couple of days cycling in the Hoi An area, before transferring by train to Nha Trang in Southern Vietnam. From there we cycled down the coast to Phan Rang before heading inland to Dalat and Bao Loc, and then transferring by coast to Ho Chi Minh.

### Colour, Noise and Smells

There were highlights and low moments in this extraordinary country of colour, noise, and smells. Cycling through beautiful countryside of paddy fields, banana trees, and sweet corn, it was predominantly green; children would run out to the road to shout 'Hello' as a fast moving line of helmeted westerners flew past, heads down and legs pumping. We were competing on the roads with Vietnamese cyclists carrying everything except the kitchen sink, motorbikes carrying the whole family (including what looked like a new born baby), engines on wheels pulling a cart quite likely to contain livestock, cars, trucks, and buses. The latter would come

steaming past, slowing for no one, honking their horns every couple of seconds, sometimes so loudly you nearly fell off your bike. The noise of the horns was completely overwhelming.

### What Rules?

We quickly learnt that there were few rules of

the road and that motorbikes could appear from nowhere and expect to be given right of way. Negotiating roundabouts was an interesting experience, but apart from minor injuries to a few innocent pedestrians, there were no serious accidents during the trip. One of the biggest challenges was the heat, which at a peak of 97 degrees Fahrenheit, caused sunburn, heat exhaustion, and very bumpy prickly heat. One of the joys we looked forward to was a jug of water being poured over our heads at the rest stops which occurred every 20 Kms or so!

Daily cycling distances were long, with the maximum being 75 miles. Distance was not the only challenge, with at least one day including a continuous uphill climb of 10 Kms, rewarded with a beautiful view down into the valley, and a tour round a magnificent Pagoda after a gentle downhill run of 18Kms. Most days were hot and sunny, but there were a couple of heavy downpours. On one occasion the road quickly became flooded and we were cycling through over a foot of water. Arriving back at the hotel, we discovered that there are not

many places that the mud thrown up by the bicycle wheels doesn't get to!

### **Any Takers For Scorpion?**

Mostly the food was delightfully tasty and light, rather like Thai food. Our final meal in Ho Chi Minh was at a place frequented by locals, where we cooked our own meat and fish (including eels) at the table. Our tour guide spotted a menu on the wall which advertised a real delicacy - scorpion. Yes, he ordered four large scorpions, which were passed around the table so that everyone could take a bite and no, I don't wish to repeat

the experience! Visiting the war museum with its story of the Vietnam War was sobering, but wandering round the streets and markets of Ho Chi Minh was fascinating. I have to admit to being glad to leave the constant noise and bustle behind, but am so glad to have experienced such an intriguing and different culture and way of life.

Thank you to all those who helped me raise £1,500, (I paid all my own costs for the trip), for the **National Deaf Children's Society**.  
**Fiona Walthall**

## **Plant Sale Triumphs to Help the RDA**

It was pouring with rain and miserably cold; certainly not ideal weather for Gail and Sue's **Annual Charity Plant Sale** on Shipton Village Green.

### **RDA's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

Yet it was a huge success, the plants and cakes made just over £1,000 for the **Riding for the Disabled (Abingdon Group)**. It is our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year and so we would like to say a very special 'thank you' to Sue and Gail and to all who so generously contributed.

Some of our present riders have qualified for the **National RDA Dressage Competition in July**, including an extremely disabled adult who won three Gold Medals at swimming in the last Para-Olympics and who is now determined to



compete in dressage at the Beijing Olympics. Our greatest hopes are pinned on a 16 year old who, having ridden with us since he was two, has every chance of making the Para-Olympic dressage team. Pretty amazing!

### **Sponsored Ride at Blenheim**

In August I will be taking our annual week's riding holiday for disabled riders along the Ridgeway, which is always so enjoyable. The Duke of Marlborough has kindly given us permission to hold a **Sponsored Ride on September 16<sup>th</sup>** in the grounds of **Blenheim Palace**. This is a unique opportunity to ride in the Park, so if you own or can borrow a horse, please come and join us.

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