

BRITISH EMBASSY CHARITY CAMEL TREK, MAY 2007

by Malika Browne



It was the reactions of everyone we told that first started to worry me. From the shopkeeper in the Souq Jabiyye in Damascus who sold me a sheepskin (for extra padding on the saddle), to the man behind the counter at the shop in London where I bought reinforced cycling shorts (in case the sheepskin was insufficient), to family and friends, there

were sniggers and cries of disbelief from every direction.

Yes, it was true. I was off to ride a camel for charity, in the desert with friends from the embassy. Were we mad? The whole world seemed to think so. The whole world also seemed to enjoy the idea (and gory details) of how much pain we would be in once we had ridden a camel for a week. The only people who never laughed at us and who supported us all the way were the generous sponsors, who donated funds to our chosen charities without a moment's hesitation. They were: Shell, Dove Energy, ChamTours, Bahi Motors, Stratic Energy and Ramak

Duty Free, and we owe them huge thanks.

We were five in total. The organiser of the expedition, Colonel Julian Lyne-Perkis, had always dreamed of trekking through the Syrian desert, and now just before the end of his posting, he was going to fulfil that dream. On 1st May we drove to Deir Ez Zour for a night beside the broad meandering Euphrates. The next morning we were in Resafe by 7am to meet our camels. It was a beautiful summer's morning, and the blue sky stretched in widescreen above the ruined Byzantine city. I chose my camel for its name – Casanova – and we all clambered on.

