

Hitching With a Mission

“She only spoke Spanish, none of us spoke a bit of Spanish, but we knew she was a bit crazy. She would say something and then laugh to herself. Sometimes she would just start swerving the car,” Alex chuckles. His hands are in the ten and two position going from right to left on his imaginary steering wheel.

Some people might be a little hesitant to get into multiple cars with multiple strangers for 1,200 miles, but not Alex. Yes, Alex Pirie willingly stepped in a car with a strange Spanish woman, but all for a good cause—the Morocco Hitch.

“Alex is singularly one of the most relaxed and laid back people I know, nothing seems to really bother him too much and as a general rule he takes everything as it comes, which is an extremely useful quality to have when you’re hitchhiking across continents,” Andy Whelan, Alex’s best friend, says.

The thrill of hitching seemed like it would be enough reason for Alex, but he also raised about 450 pounds for Africa. As a whole, Swansea University collected 11,420 plus pounds for projects in Sub-Saharan Africa. Alex pulls out his laptop to find the exact numbers. The organization running the hitch, Link Community Development, raised more than 2.5 million pounds since 1992.

In December, while Alex was at a poker tournament in Whitez, he saw the poster for the Morocco Hitch. Looking to his flatmate, he said, “SO doing that.” Later that night Alex found the Morocco Hitch Facebook group and he was hooked. “I just remember thinking, ‘wow’ as

I looked at the pictures of people riding camels in the desert,” Alex says with excitement as he harks back to his hitchhiking expedition.

“We had a dry erase board and put jokes on it and danced,” Alex smilingly says. He must have danced pretty well, or it might have been his best friend Andy—his hitching partner—whose moves attracted the attention of strangers, because they got picked up 10 times on their hitch.

“This year was easy. Forty-five minutes was the longest we waited. Last year, there was a point that I didn’t think we were going to get a lift. We danced, we juggled, and we swore a little. Someone even threw a coke bottle at my hitch partner, Joe,” Alex exclaims while laughing a little under his breath.

Random Spanish lady, Laura, was Alex and Andy’s saving grace. She may have dropped them off at an abandoned round a bout at eleven o clock at night, but Alex was thankful to get out of Fuengirola, Spain. I wondered what was so bad about Fuengirola. While Alex and Andy were contemplating their next move for their journey, a man honked his horn, rolled down his window, and performed the slitting of the throat movement towards Alex. This was in the central part of town of Fuengirola. My curiosities subside after that story. “I could understand if the guy was in the car with his mates trying to be funny, but he was by himself. Me and Andy decided this probably wasn’t the friendliest of places,” Alex reiterates.

Laura was his favourite ride, maybe because she drove him miles from potential murderer, or maybe he just liked a little crazy in his life. “She was an absolute nutter. We were in Fuengir...yea, that place, it’s getting dark, and we’re thinking we should probably find a

place to stay. We're desperate for a lift, run to the motorway, and then Laura picked us up. She only spoke Spanish. None of us spoke a bit of Spanish, but we knew she was a bit crazy. We even talked to her best friend Mary P. on the phone. Of course we had no clue what she was saying, but she would just hand us the phone and we would hear some fast Spanish words," Alex remarks.

Staying in only one hostel throughout the five days it took Alex and Andy to reach Morocco, I wonder how they managed to shower. Alex touches his hair and says, "We did shower one day. In Morocco we went six or seven days without showering, and my hair tends to get a bit greasy after going a day."

We're sitting in the dining room of the Fulton House but I feel like we're sitting in Morocco, greasy hair and all. Alex's words bring you to his story.

Alex continued, "We camped in a place called the Cascades Douzoud." I laughed, asking if the cascades counted as a shower. His favourite spot in Morocco was the cascades. The sombre joy in his voice told me this before he even had to. Scrolling through pictures of the cascades, Alex pointed to the spot where he cliff jumped. Not only did Alex jump off a cliff into a bay of water, but also he was the first to dive in, with no idea how deep the water was. Some would call this sheer stupidity, but others, bravery.

Talking to Alex for the first time is effortless, and Andy is completely appreciative of his best friend's ability to talk to strangers. "I unfortunately developed a habit where I would, completely unintentionally of course, fall asleep during the hitch so Alex would have to rise to the occasion and keep up the small talk, for which I was extremely grateful," Andy says.

Alex changed after his hitch experience, because of his adventures and the true, honest kindness he found in the world. "There's so much crap going on all the time. The news is full of horror stories, sick people, depressing things, liars and the rest of it. It was such a great experience to meet people who are willing to help you with little or no profit for them. Nine out of 10, picking up a hitch hiker is all the evidence you need for the existence of altruism."