



ONE OF A KIND

The donation of a pair of the Club's social memberships for charity is helping to fund a couple of projects headed up by legendary explorer Colonel John Blashford-Snell OBE. So Ten Goal sent Major Jamie Hayward, who first met JBS some 30 years ago in remote Central America, but this time armed only with a map and GPS, to this redoubtable adventurer's West Country lair – the Scientific Exploration Society's HQ

My previous encounter with the enigmatic adventurer and explorer Colonel John Blashford-Snell (hereafter referred to as JBS) was greeting him, replete in his signature pith helmet, on his arrival at a remote Pacific beach on the Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica. JBS had come to open a bridge, close to the Corcavado National Park, that my team of Operation Raleigh adventurers, under JBS's overall command, had just completed.

His infectious dynamism, zest for life and desire to help others remains clearly undimmed in the intervening three decades. Within five minutes of my arrival at his Dorset HQ, we had galloped around the globe with his recollections of numerous expeditions to far-flung corners of the planet. Whether assisting the needy and under-privileged, sailing the oceans, navigating uncharted rivers, taking vehicles through the impossible, being attacked by crocodiles and unfriendly tribesmen, or bizarrely taking a grand piano to the depths of the Guyanan jungle JBS has worn the T-shirt; always with style, panache and



JBS pushing a canoe up some rapids in Guyana

a certain *je ne c'est croix*. JBS was, and remains, one of a kind.

That is all very interesting but why is this particular character, a touch eccentric who oozes the qualities and traits of centuries gone by, the ideal subject for an article for Guards Polo Club's Ten Goal magazine? The answer lies with June Howell-Jones, a Social Member at Guards Polo Club of 40 years' standing, who is an accomplished fundraiser through her expansive network of friends and contacts.

In May 2017, the delivery of a hospital boat for the Colombian Ticuna Indians, deep in the headwaters of the Amazon, through the auspices of JBS and the Scientific Exploration Society (SES), identified a further need for the rehabilitation of a clean water supply. With typical enthusiasm, June embraced the project and co-ordinated a fundraising evening at Canning House in London in February of this year. The total raised, £4,250, included the auctioning of a Guards Polo Club non-playing membership. It was not long before the Colombian in-

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country representative of SES reported the rehabilitation of the water system allowing safe water to be piped to all the village houses!

Such was the success of this initiative, only a month from fundraising evening to project completion, that Guards Polo Club generously donated a further membership. This was a raffle prize at the 50th Anniversary Lecture of JBS's iconic Blue Nile Exploration Expedition, in early October, at the Royal Geographical Society. This event was to help raise funds for the CURE hospital in Ethiopia, which provides life-changing orthopaedic operations for disadvantaged Ethiopian children.

To this day, JBS's 1968 Blue Nile Exploration remains a pivotal moment in his undeniably very full life. Commissioned into the Royal Engineers in 1957, his first tour to Cyprus, as an Army diver, which involved surveying beaches for possible recapture, looking for lost underwater cities and assisting de-mining operations in Libya, set the young adventurer on his life's path. Having turned down joining the Gurkha



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Engineers, JBS became accomplished at avoiding any job that involved desks or paperwork and adept in inveigling himself into anything that promised adventure, thrill or something new. At the time the British Army was eager for inspiring role models to project the diverse extent of military life and JBS found himself quickly mentored by some highly decorated and well-respected World War Two generals.

General Sir John Mogg, who as Commandant of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst appointed JBS as Adventure Training Officer, gave him his first big break. JBS took Sandhurst cadets all over the world, including Ethiopia, in 1966, where Emperor Haile Selassie personally invited JBS to return and "explore my Blue Nile"!

True to his word, an Imperial invitation soon landed on the desk of the then Commandant of the Royal Military College of Science, Shrivenham, Lieutenant General Sir Napier Crookenden, his next mentor. JBS was supposedly studying the intricacies of military science. Crookenden though

neatly waived the niceties of military study (later directing the academics to give him a pass even though he'd barely attended class) and ordered JBS to immerse himself in the now legendary 1968 Blue Nile Expedition - involving its first descent and exploration.

The 60-strong expedition braved treacherous rapids, murderous tribesmen with muzzle loaders, hungry crocodiles and constant hunger (their last days were spent eating crocodile cooked in engine oil!) before emerging at the bottom. The men's outfitters, Moss Bros, had given JBS a pith helmet which he wore throughout this adventure and on all subsequent expeditions. Meanwhile, as a thank-you gift to their host, JBS presented the Ethiopian Emperor with a Chihuahua! The die was now cast – and JBS has never looked back!

Further expeditions followed thick and fast. The Dahlak Islands in the Red Sea, investigating the islanders' blindness, was followed in 1971-72 by the first vehicular crossing of the Darien Gap in Panama and Colombia, thus linking the Pan-American Highway

from Alaska to Cape Horn. In 1974-75 JBS headed up the 160-man Zaire River Expedition that navigated almost its entire 2,700-mile length.

Two royal equerries had been on that Zaire trip and their tales reached an ear of influence. JBS received an invitation from HRH The Prince of Wales to think of something inspiring to bring together, nurture and grow the youth from around the world and he would be the organisation's patron. This was the start of Operation Drake (1978–80) and Operation Raleigh (1984–90) which became Raleigh International. By 1992 it had launched 10,000 young people from 50 nations into challenging and rewarding scientific, wildlife and community projects worldwide – which number amongst their illustrious and diverse alumni The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and the astronaut Tim Peake.

To this day Operations Drake and Raleigh remain JBS's proudest achievements. He has genuinely influenced and enhanced the lives of remote and disadvantaged peoples the

*JBS on Honey Blossom,
his elephant in Nepal*





*JBS at the Scientific
Exploration Society's HQ*



*Ticuna
dancer*



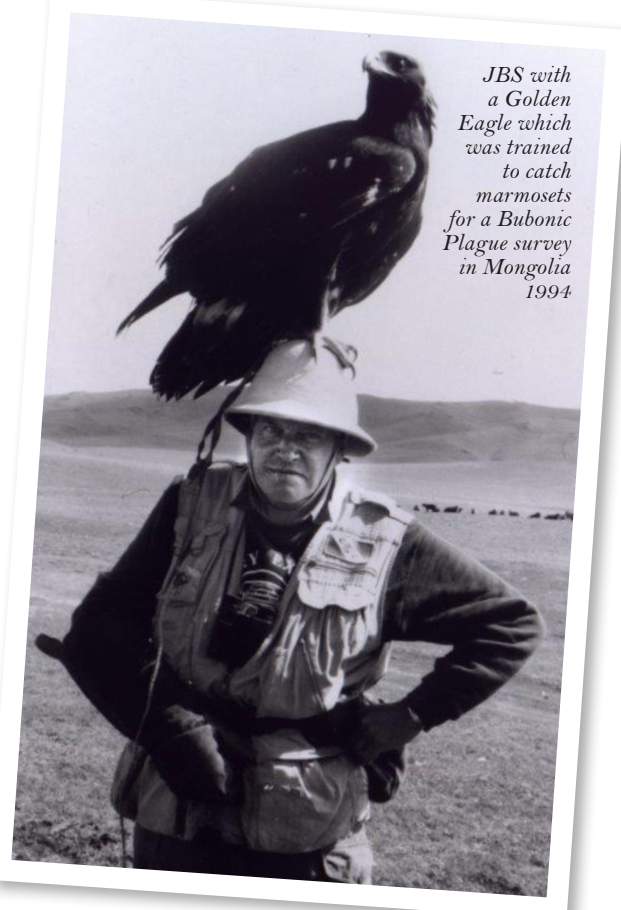
*JBS in Mongolia
in 2018*

Without much hesitation JBS would add that, in a life brimming over with incredible adventures "the Blue Nile was the most dangerous, the Darien Gap the most physically demanding and the Zaire River the most politically challenging"

world over as well as all 40,000 participants of an Operation Drake, Raleigh or Raleigh International project so far. Without much hesitation JBS would also add that, in a life brimming over with incredible adventures, "the Blue Nile was the most dangerous, the Darien Gap the most physically demanding and the Zaire River the most politically challenging".

So what next for this great adventurer? Now in his 83rd year and blessed with robust health, JBS has just returned from the depths of Mongolia and is already deeply immersed in planning his next expedition. This is scheduled for March 2019 and is to study the giant elephants of Bardia in Western Nepal.

One might think that JBS would then hang up his pith helmet, take to his rocking chair and reflect on an extraordinarily fulfilling and rewarding life. Perish the thought! Following his Nepal trip, JBS has his sights set back on South America, either Brazil or Bolivia, and the next eventful chapter in an equally amazing life. 🌟



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