

Azerbaijan v Wales ...Diary of The Baku or Bust Trip

Friday May 22nd 2009

6 of the 9 vehicles who were making the trip assembled at the Sophia gardens car park in Cardiff at 5 pm for a press conference and final farewell to their families.

At 6.15 they were on their way, another vehicle had also left from Conwy, that left just two more...the Cardiff City supporters car, which was due to leave on Bank holiday Monday...this car was being manned by Vince Alm and Gwilym Rees and the car from Watford, due to leave on Friday 29th May, containing experienced road travellers Jim Mason and Dave Granville, who have previously driven to Mongolia and Africa.

As the cars arrived late into Dover a problem was detected in the big red Taxi, the problem was too expensive to repair, a worn out diesel pump and the Taxi had to be scrapped by the AA. This left the team with a big problem...3 people without transport and a load of gifts for the orphanages with no storage space.

Saturday May 23rd 2009

Two of the Taxi crew joined another vehicle, Neil Dymock had to hire a vehicle, and put all the luggage and gifts into the hire car and return it back to his house for storage, and these goods will be used to help another orphanage in the future.

The rest of the vehicles boarded the ferry and were soon in mainland Europe.

They travel through France, Belgium and Luxemburg. The car from Conwy has reported that they have now reached Heidelberg in Germany after driving a total of 815 miles; they are awaiting the arrival of the rest of the cars but will be staying the night here.

Sunday May 24th 2009

Autobahn delays and searing temperatures are making the journey difficult for the teams; they are trying to keep the cars from over heating in long traffic Jams but are moving through East Germany and after another long day the cars have reached Vienna in Austria...well saying that, reports are coming in of another breakdown, possibly a head gasket. This may mean that the blue people carrier will have to be scrapped and the five passengers having to travel by train to meet the convoy in Bulgaria, by which time there will be room in the vehicles for them to travel onwards.

Monday May 25th 2009

The last of the convoy has left Cardiff; they have picked up Neil Dymock on route and will now try to catch the rest of the vehicles by Thursday.

News of the VW camper breakdown and the worse news that it has to be scrapped last night near Munich is just reaching the rest of the convoy...They have hired another vehicle, put all the goods they had for the orphanages into the hire car. They are now going to give the gifts to an orphanage in Munich. They will then drive to Munich airport and fly down to Sunny beach in Bulgaria to meet up with the rest of the convoy. AA have been good to them though... put them up in a hotel for last night and tonight. They've also paid for them to fly from Munich to Sunny Beach tomorrow morning.

Biffo, his wife and Kevin Davies (Caerphilly) and Tim Hartley have reached Slovakia. The next few vehicles have reached the Austria/ Slovakia border; two get fined for no Vignette (road tax).

Vince, Gwilym and Neil Dymock have reached Reading (11am Monday)

The convoy has visited the Podunajske Biskupice Orphanage in Bratislava, this is an orphanage that Gol donated £750 to in 2004, to help set up some sporting facilities for the children.

The main convoy has now moved into Hungary this afternoon and they are heading towards Budapest...Back in Dover, the last vehicle has broken down...Neil, Vince and Gwyllym awaiting AA...Diesel leaking everywhere...

The main convoy has reached the Gyermekotthon Orphanage in Budapest. They are made very welcome here and the gifts donated are gratefully received by the children...the team are staying the night in Budapest in a hostel...only 10 Euros a night per person...

Good news at 6 pm from Dover, the broken down vehicle has been repaired and the lads are waiting for the ferry...fingers crossed the car is now running well. They intend driving all night to try to make some ground on the other cars.

Tuesday May 26th 2009

Neil Dymock, Gwyllym Rees and Vince Alm decided to drive through the night and passed Vienna during in the early hours. Update from Mark Colclough in Budapest...cars left = 5 in Hungary: VX Cavalier, VX Astra, Toyota Corolla, Isuzu 4x4 & a Rover. 6th car, the VX Omega is now only 45 minutes from Budapest (11.40 am) Vince and his crew have done really well to make up time.

There is another car that will start the trip on Friday; we will keep you updated on their progress.

Afternoon update

Neil Dymock and his team has reached Budapest after a journey of 1280 miles, they have decided to make camp now and will do so at Euro camp near Szeged, Szeged is situated near the southern border of Hungary, just to the south of the mouth of the Maros River, on both banks of the Tisza River.

Main group have got their Romanian road tax and crossed the border into Romania, roads not too good now, they have driven through Nădlac, Pecica, Sâtleani, Deva and Simeria enroute to Bucharest... Driving conditions and the roads are very poor so far in Romania, over 8 hours driving and still 100 KM outside Bucharest (6 pm)

The group will stop here the night and drive to Bucharest Tomorrow. Neil, Vince and Gwyllym will meet up with main group Tomorrow in Bucharest.

The guys who were in the broken down people carrier have safely arrived in Sunny beach thanks to the AA flying them down there...all the groups will meet in Bulgaria (Sunny Beach).

Driving conditions and the roads are very poor so far in Romania, over 8 hours driving and still 100 KM outside Bucharest (6 pm).

Wednesday May 27th 2009

Neil Dymock's group make an early start on the road to Bucharest, they have been forewarned about the poor driving conditions. Police stopped their vehicle for having no lights on, but allowed the team to continue with just a warning.

At 1 pm Today Vince reported that their car was struggling with the road conditions, shaky exhaust, they are moving slowly, now just 320 miles from Bucharest.

Latest report from Mark's blog

Mark Colclough's group have reached Bucharest after a stunning drive, winding through mountain pass in Transylvania, STUNNING! They were held up by horse and cart and people rolling milk churns. They report that they feel very far from home. Tim Hartley and his son are also there. Stood on the Chaulescus palace balcony, overlooking the longest boulevard in Bucharest, 1metre longer than Paris' temperature 32c, they are glad they are stopping the night here...car needs resting.

Three cars have now reached Sunny Beach in Bulgaria and joined up with the lads who flew out there from Munich.

Mark and his group are enjoying downtime in Bucharest old town square, 3 LEI a pint = 0.80p Sorted for Champions League final! Neil Dymock/sweeper car due 10pm (8pm UK), they should make it to watch the game.

Message came through that the last car has now reached Bucharest, they decided to put Neil Dymock in a taxi and Vince Alm followed the taxi to the Happy Hostel in the middle of the city; they hope to catch some of the Champions league final after a long old day.

Thursday May 28th 2009

Morning

Another project was visited this morning in Rumania; the guys were met with a great welcome by the children and staff at the Harap Alb centre This is part of the <http://www.familycare.org/network/e11.htm>, many gifts were given to the orphanage and the convoy has now left Bucharest on its way to catch the three cars that have already made it to Bulgaria...and Sunny beach.

Afternoon

1 pm. The cavalier that was transporting Marc Colclough has suddenly stopped for no reason; they are looking at their options. Kevin Davies, Biffo and his missus already in Sunny beach are looking to drive back to rescue the stranded team.....Kevin probably drive back on his own to save space

3pm Apparently the Cavalier is moving again...onwards to Burges in Bulgaria...I have sent details of Trains and car hire possibilities out to Neil Dymock, in case there are further problems..

4 pm and further problems only one mile from Romanian border and the Conwy crews Cavalier finally comes to a halt. Kaput...offloaded for parts to a Romanian and everyone piles in to Vince's car, including luggage...Isuzu 4x4 also heading back to rescue them....

The overweight in Vince Alms Cardiff City Supporters club Omega has caused a further problem and that car has hit a bump and the sump is seriously damaged...they are travelling slowly towards Burges and the rest of the group are safely onboard the rescue vehicle (Biffo's 4x4) that went back to meet them

Finally all get to Sunny beach...the Omega spewing out oil...not looking good...only 4 vehicles realistically looking capable of travelling on from here.

It is 11 pm in Bulgaria, 4 decent vehicles, one limping Omega, 24 Welsh fans in Sunny Beach getting drunk tonight...they are holding a crisis meeting first thing in the morning...looking at hiring car or cars in Istanbul on the weekend...whatever happens they will continue the trip.

Friday May 29, 2009

They visited an orphanage in Bourgas, the same one that Gol went to 2 years ago, this morning it went really well.

Tim Hartley from and Biffo's cars started out on the next leg of the journey to Istanbul.

Biffo's car (4x4 Isuzu) cannot go further than 4th gear and is feeling the strain of the bad roads.

The Astra went straight to Istanbul. Whereas the Corolla went to Borges, then back to Sunny Beach before heading to Istanbul

The 7 guys from the last two cars to fail have caught a bus to Istanbul where we are looking to hire two cars to get across Turkey.

Neil Dymock, Vince Alm and Gwilym Rees are still in Sunny beach, where they are preparing to drive the Omega through the night into Turkey or until it runs out of oil and blows up.

The leak is bad, but if they keep it at 70km an hour they hope to get some distance before topping up with oil again.

Just had a message off Neil Dymock that Vince Alm and Gwilym Rees have both been victims of pick pockets in Bulgaria, Gypsies surrounded them in the city and they later realised they had been robbed, a mobile phone and over 300 Euros are missing.

Vince and Gwilym spent a few hours with the police today and attended an identity parade to spot the thieves, last we heard was that Vince has got his phone back but it is out of use because he already had reported it stolen and had the contract stopped.

The guys now without cars are aboard the overnight coach to Istanbul, everyone is hoping for a better day tomorrow.

All everyone's thoughts are now focused on getting across Turkey with all 24 people, where they have support waiting in Georgia. There is a daunting trip of over 900 miles from Bulgaria to the Georgia border, right across the top of Turkey.

Saturday May 30th 2009

The 7 lads on the overnight coach from Bulgaria to Turkey have made it into Istanbul, after a one hour delay at the border...they are in a very hot coach station working out how to get across the city to the airport. Underground looks best bet, they intend meeting up with the rest of the teams at the Airport

The Omega has limped into Turkey along with the faltering 4 x 4 Isuzu, The Astra, Rover and Corolla are proving the most reliable...at the moment....Neil Dymock, Vince and Gwilym, recovering from their robbery are looking at a 420 mile route from Istanbul to the Black sea port of Samsun.

Afternoon

There are 6 cars now in a convoy about 350 KM from Samsun, four of the original cars that left Wales plus two hire cars...Vince Alm, Gwilym and Neil Dymock...limping along, leaking oil about one hour behind the main convoy.

Heard from Neil Dymock at 1 pm (BST) they are losing oil at an alarming rate, they have already used 8 litres today travelling the 451 miles covered since they started at 5 am

this morning; their total mileage to date is now 2,436 miles...word is that the two hire cars will meet them near a town called Tosya...they really want to persevere with the Omega but may all have to squeeze into the hire cars and abandon their vehicle...decisions to be made...

The Last car to leave the UK, with the two experienced drivers, Jim Mason and Dave Granville was last reported to have already passed through Luxemburg...and is making good time.

Last report I heard Tonight is that the front running vehicles are making great progress through the Black sea regions of Turkey...one hire car and the oil spewing Omega are lagging behind and have stopped for the night on some Turkish service area...All are healthy and seem happy enough ready for the final push into Georgia where their support awaits them.

Sunday 31 May, 2009

Some of the 27 fans making the trip, who have I missed?

Gavin Jones	Rhys Iorwerth	Osian Edwards	Janet Hathway	David Jones	
Owain Llyr Colclough	Gerallt Williams	Kevin Davies	Vince Alm	Marc	
Neil Dymock Jones	Tim Hartley	Chester Hartley	Phil Holmes	John	
Gwilym Rees	Jim Mason	Dave Granville	Biffo	Hywel Iorwerth	Dafydd James

Biffo, Kevin, Dave and Janet are amongst the front runners heading towards the Black Sea Port of Trabzon, once there they are only 266 miles from Tbilisi, Georgia. They have mentioned visiting the Georgian Cities of Batumi, on the border and have arranged to meet people in Kutaisi (177 miles from Trabzon)...this City is twinned with Newport.

News from Vince Alm, Gwilym and Neil Dymock is better, they have had the Omega fixed and its running better, they stayed the night in Gungor (total miles from Cardiff done 2620) they are now heading to Samsun, hopefully reach Trabzon, and if they are feeling ok will head to Batumi in Georgia later this evening...cost of repair was \$125, travelled a few miles and hit a brick!!!! However, the car, alongside the hire car who has stayed back to support it, are both making better progress Today.

Late Afternoon

5 cars are in Trabzon, Neil Dymock is having problems contacting contacts in Georgia...they have left the hire cars now are have a mini bus to take the ones without cars to Georgian border....Jim and Dave, who only started out early Friday morning are making great progress and are in Sofia, Bulgaria, their aim is to reach Istanbul before midnight Tonight...and catch up with the main convoy by Wednesday.

Long delay at the Border, Neil Dymock stopped twice by police trying to go back and fro no mans land sorting out the cars etc, eventually the guards came around and decided to allow him to go where he likes.

After two long hours in very warm, unpleasant conditions they get through border and head towards Batumi in Georgia...not the nicest of places, pretty rough by all accounts and they will probably all stay in the hotel bar Tonight...Tomorrow at Ten a.m. they are going to Kutaisi, just 5 cars still standing, but support from the mayor of the city who is

sending another car to assist them...they are promised an escort into the City and a warm welcome.

They have travelled through Wales, England, France, Belgium, Luxemburg, Germany, Check Rep, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and are now in Georgia...a total of 2918 miles or 4695 kilometres...since leaving on May 22nd....

They still have some civic receptions to attend in Georgia before the final trip into Azerbaijan...they started with 9 cars, they have lost the people carrier, the Taxi, and finally the Cavalier, they have made running repairs on the 4x 4 Isuzu and somehow the Vauxhall Omega is still road worthy...

Monday June 1st 2009

The convoy have left Batumi at 7 am British time...or 10 am local time...they are not sorry to leave either...It was a really rough place with police everywhere...some of the group felt very uneasy there and they are glad to be on the road out of there on their way through the Georgian countryside to Kutaisi...5 cars running quite well Today.

The team have finally reached Kutaisi (10am BST) where they are met by members of the Kutaisi Newport twinning association...who have lined up a few events and good causes visits for Today.

Afternoon

Jim Mason and Dave Granville, who only left last Friday are reported to be near to Samsun in Turkey and hope to be with the main group tomorrow.

The main group have played a challenge football match against a young team from Georgia; Wales won 6-3 with goals coming from Neil Dymock, Hywel Iorwerth, 2, Osian Edwards Dafydd James and an own goal...Gifts were donated to the opponents, at the football sports school Martve 91, mainly Newport AFC shirts and football items donated. Books were also donated to a children's home Number 44, along with other Welsh gifts...

A few of the team went to visit the Newport/Kutaisi office and were met by the mayor...they also got to meet 5 Georgian football players. They donated 4 of their cars that had served them so well and still need to donate the last car; they have visited a cathedral and a monastery where Marc Colclough convinced the monks to chant for a Welsh Victory...plans are to spend another day here Tomorrow. Everyone is in good health and although it has been a difficult, tiring journey, they all seem very happy to have made the trip...I got news to them Today that the match tickets were being paid for by the FAW and they were all pleased to hear that news.

Tuesday June 2nd 2009

Apart from the two lads still travelling, Today was a rest day from the roads but still a hectic schedule.

The main group have a busy day of events lined up in Kutaisi, Georgia, they are reporting that they saved a cat from a kicking from a group of workmen late last night and have now taken the rescued cat, now named Tosh, to the safety of the monastery, where it will be looked after...This morning they have visited two schools, the university and an orphanage. They are having lunch now still reeling from the fact that Dymock has named Biffo as the captain for the match later this afternoon against a select Georgian fans team.

Afternoon

Mark Colclough reports from his blog that they had lunch with governor of the bank of Georgia, and that they just met their Olympic gold medallist at judo, he's big & he's in their team later: Georgia v USA.

They are now back in the team hotel and are wondering whether manager Dymock's radical 8 debut caps work? Or will the mayor plying us with Georgian wine tactic pay off? The match is at half time and Wales are 3-0 down and our goalkeeper, David Jones has suffered an injury and had to be replaced, it is currently a mind blowing 44 c in the sun and blustery wind, very difficult to play in.

Second half and the Wales fans score a great goal through Hywel Iorwerth, but finally lost 5-1 in a sometimes ill tempered game in the heat.

News from the two lads that left last Friday is that they have reached the Georgian border and hope to join the main group in three hours time...amazing effort by those two.

Tomorrow they will be making plans to leave Georgia and head into Azerbaijan.

Wednesday June 3rd, 2009

Morning

The plan this morning was to visit an Orphanage in Gori, a town of 50,000 residents; the city was occupied by Russian troops during the 2008 South Ossetian War. Gori is also known as the birthplace of the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin so it should be an interesting day.

Two hours later and everyone is stuck in Kutaisi, some under house arrest for illegal car importing, although all the cars were registered...it appears to be a problem with paperwork, and may mean them travelling directly to Tbilisi to sort it out.

Afternoon

Four hours after they intended leaving, they are still stuck in Kutaisi, it is boiling out and the mood is not good. The Georgian President is involved in this matter now and they have support there, it is hoped this can be resolved soon. Mark Colclough's blog suggests that the problem is merely a customs issue and the fact that they have never had to deal with cars imported from Britain before...they have also been doing interviews today for newspapers back home in Wales.

Late afternoon and Neil Dymock thinks they may have real problems; they are all still stuck in Kutaisi. I have sent them the number of the duty officer at the embassy in Tbilisi; hopefully they can help because the Embassy is now closed for the day. Finally at 6.30 in the evening (Georgia time) all 26 of the group have been allowed to leave Kutaisi, car problems and paperwork behind them...they are heading straight to Tbilisi, tired but relieved to be on the move again, all but three are drunk and Biffo from the Rhondda is leading the singing on the bus, Neil, Vince and Gwilym are the last three sober.

Finally on the coach on the overland trip to Tbilisi, oblivious to most things, tearing across 300k to Tbilisi to meet the British ambassador & press at embassy; LATE, filthy & many "worse for wear" and suddenly the flaming bus breaks down! It is a serious, engine fire. They are stranded in a sun setting Georgia, this isn't good.

DRIVER FIXES THE BUS! In true football fan style, half the lads ran into the river for a skinny dip with their Georgian brandy, great footage on video camera; what a day this is turning out to be!!!!

Bus moving fine now and approaching Gori, they have just crossed a bridge that was bombed in the war with Russia last year...it is late evening...very hot travelling.

Finally get the message from Neil Dymock that they have arrived at their hotel in Tbilisi, it is 2 am Georgia time...they have totally missed the civic reception and meal with the Ambassador and have to leave at 7.30 am in the morning to head to the border...there are still a good few orphanages to visit in Azerbaijan before they reach Baku.

Thursday June 4th 2009

After Yesterday's difficult day the 26 Welsh fans left (Chester Hartley returned to Wales in when they reached Turkey, he had exams to take) wanted to make an early start. Tbilisi is a city still with big problems and the fans were held up by roadblocks and local demonstrations, it is turning into a struggle just to leave the city.

11 am Georgian Time and I get a text off Neil Dymock saying that the 26 are now all standing on Azerbaijan soil, they have got through the border and almost completed the adventure...they are to be met at the border and will visit a couple of Azeri Orphanages shortly...they have money to buy suitable things to donate to the children.

Afternoon

The Following is an update from Marc Colclough's blog site

Negotiated Tbilisi roadblocks, bombed bridges, bombed roads & high desert roads; waiting to cross into no-mans land, and into Azerbaijan...12 noon Azeri time

OFFICIALLY IN AZERBAIJAN! +4 GMT. Awaiting transport chatting with peak cap camouflage armed to teeth border guards. Extreme heat! Road=Dust 1pm Azeri time

Aviators on, Azeri hip-hop on radio, driving through mountains and a desert dustbowl, already LOVE Azerbaijan! City of Ganja & orphanage next 3 pm Azerbaijan time 11am (BST)

Neil Dymock's mobile his run out of contract temporarily so I will have to rely on Marc's blog to finish Today's diary, hope to get back in touch with Neil Tomorrow

They have become "the" attraction; 25 lads, one lady all in their Wales tops, having lemon tea in Ganjas Ancient Park.

He sends back Thank s for donations; the orphanages have all asked to pass on their thanks to all that raised money to help the orphanages.

Late in the evening and they are sat a restaurant in Ganja, table crawling! They are leaving for Baku at 6am for press conference with players & coaches at 1.30pm in team hotel.

There was a Great speech from Gol trustee Neil Dymock, who explains that "over £13,000 was raised and used to help many projects and orphanages along this epic trip.

Marc finishes by saying that people back home will know how often they were nearly bust, but tomorrow its Baku!" fabulous

Friday June 5th 2009

It is exactly two weeks since the main group left Cardiff to start this unusual adventure...Day 15 and they are travelling though the strange; landscapes of this former

Soviet state, oil well after oil well are passed along the route, not the nicest place on earth.

Not a surprise now for the team but for the second time in the last few days they have broken down...Marc reports We couldn't have a drive like this without a breakdown / potential bust, 120k from Baku. Sat roadside / desert-side, HOT with a fan belt snap

Problem repaired, and they are very close to Baku now and the Caspian Sea WHAT ELSE CAN GO WRONG?

Unbelievably but true, they get pulled by police 5k from Baku city limit. They are being questioned about having Georgia plates! Giving the police Wales pin badges to isn't working as bribe anymore but once again they talk themselves out of the situation...now in true Welsh adventurer fashion they enter Baku... on the 346 service bus!

Fair play that was some trip, they are meeting up with the other fans who made the 5 hour flight to Baku, today and have another match lined up for this evening.

They have finally made it to Baku! They rushed to the players 5* hotel from service bus stop! They had photos on arrival with Ledley, Earnshaw & Hennessey and they did a Daily Post interview.

They also had drinks bought for them by the FAW and were congratulated for their efforts over the last 15 days.

Well that is it for my Diary reports...hope you all had something out of them, no doubt they will have their own versions, photographs and memories to tell on their arrival back

It truly was a trip of a life time

Corky