

# Portobello girl cycling the world for Oxfam



We caught up again over the weekend with Portobello girl, Pauline Symaniak, to find out where her bicycle called Shirley has taken her to now. Pauline is currently cycling around the world for Oxfam. You can get other news on her travels [here](#) or her lovely photos are on [Flickr](#).

“I’ve just finished the South American leg of my world cycle through Argentina, Chile and Bolivia. After being caught in an earthquake in Chile, I cycled north up the Andes on the Argentinian side! The scenery was spectacular – I cycled by snow-capped volcanoes, canyons of red rock, vineyards and orchards – and the Argentines continued to be the nicest people on the planet, except the young guy who tried (but failed) to get money out of me in the city of San Juan. Some of the cycling was quite challenging with long, empty stretches through semi-arid desert with only occasional “oasis” towns but it was beautiful – I’ve really fallen in love with Argentina. I had one problem with the bike when I buckled my rear wheel on Argentina’s rough dirt roads and had to hitch a lift to the next bike shop for a replacement. Then I had a remarkable coincidence in the off-the-beaten-track Argentine town of Malargue – I pulled into the campsite on the same day as a couple from Haddington also cycling through South America. We spent several days cycling together and it was great to talk about favourite Edinburgh and East Lothian haunts.

In the north of Argentina I started to feel a bit tired and low on energy which I put down to lack of iron. I solved the problem by cooking lots of steaks on my campstove and taking iron supplements – after I’d mimed “anaemia” to a pharmacist

and several customers in Salta! My Spanish has not improved as much as I might have hoped!

A lot of climbing then took me through beautiful rural scenery and delightful Indian towns onto the Bolivian Altiplano. Bolivia is a brilliant country. There are stunning landscapes such as the largest salt flat in the world, the Salar de Uyuni. When I visited it was still wet season so it was covered with a layer of water creating stunning reflections. Everyday life is so colourful in Bolivia and there is always something going on – carnivals, street fairs, brass bands or social protests that create chaos! I took on the challenge of cycling into La Paz, highest capital city in the world. The traffic was crazy and the streets were vertical! North of La Paz I cycled to over 13,000 feet in lung-bursting thin air to reach my final destination in South America at Lake Titicaca. Would you believe that my camera died at the very moment I arrived on the shores! I had to go back to La Paz on the bus to get a new one. Then I left the bike on dry land and took a boat to an island in the lake called Isla del Sol – it is here that legend says the very first Incas were created. It was a slice of paradise with paths rambling through Inca terraces still used to grow crops today, bays of white sand and aquamarine water, and ancient ruins and legends to hunt out. An incredible place to end the South American leg.

These last few days I've been given the bike and all my kit a good clean – even my mascot, Tigger, got a bath – as I shortly fly to the US for the next leg of my journey – a cycle coast-to-coast across North America over 5 months. I'm really excited as I'm being joined by my friend and base camp manager, Graham. It's going to be a great adventure with wonderful memories to share – we are especially worried about bears!

My fundraising for Oxfam is creeping towards 1000 pounds. I'm hoping the trans-America cycle will capture people's imaginations back home to generate more sponsorship and that

with no language barriers, I'll be able to persuade lots of Americans to part with their dollars.

After 10 months cycling across foreign lands on my own, people might be thinking that I'm getting a bit lonely or homesick ... but I'm not at all. This is my lifelong dream come true and I'm enjoying every day!"

Here are some of Pauline's most recent photos – sadly her trusty camera died and has had to be replaced. We love the one of Tigger drying out...

Pauline is cycling to raise funds for Oxfam, and you can donate to her fund on [JustGiving](#).