

## THE LONGER WAY DOWN

**O**klahoma's movie-goers jammed theaters in July to enjoy a limited engagement of "The Long Way Down," the film of another epic journey by England's Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman, this time the length of Africa. Well, I admit "jammed theaters" is an exaggeration. When we arrived for the one-night showing 45 minutes early at OKC's Tinseltown Theater "to make sure we got a good seat," we found we could choose any seat in the house. Except for the two occupied by a young couple in Tinseltown uniforms, sparking in the back of the empty theater. In all, perhaps two dozen viewers showed up for the screening. Regardless, it was an enjoyable documentary about an intriguing adventure. Not quite the scope of the pair's circumnavigation of the globe ("The Long Way Round"), but that stands to reason.

**W**atching the film brought to mind the journey of another adventure rider, also an Englishman, chronicled in the book, *Into Africa*, which I recommend to those interested in a detailed account of a similar, but more difficult (i.e. solo and unsupported) trip.

The author, Sam Manicom, considered himself an "ordinary bloke" when he undertook to ride a motorcycle the length of "The Dark Continent." Yet he knew the journey upon which he was embarking was anything but ordinary. I wonder if he could have imagined the transformation he would undergo during this adventure of body and spirit?

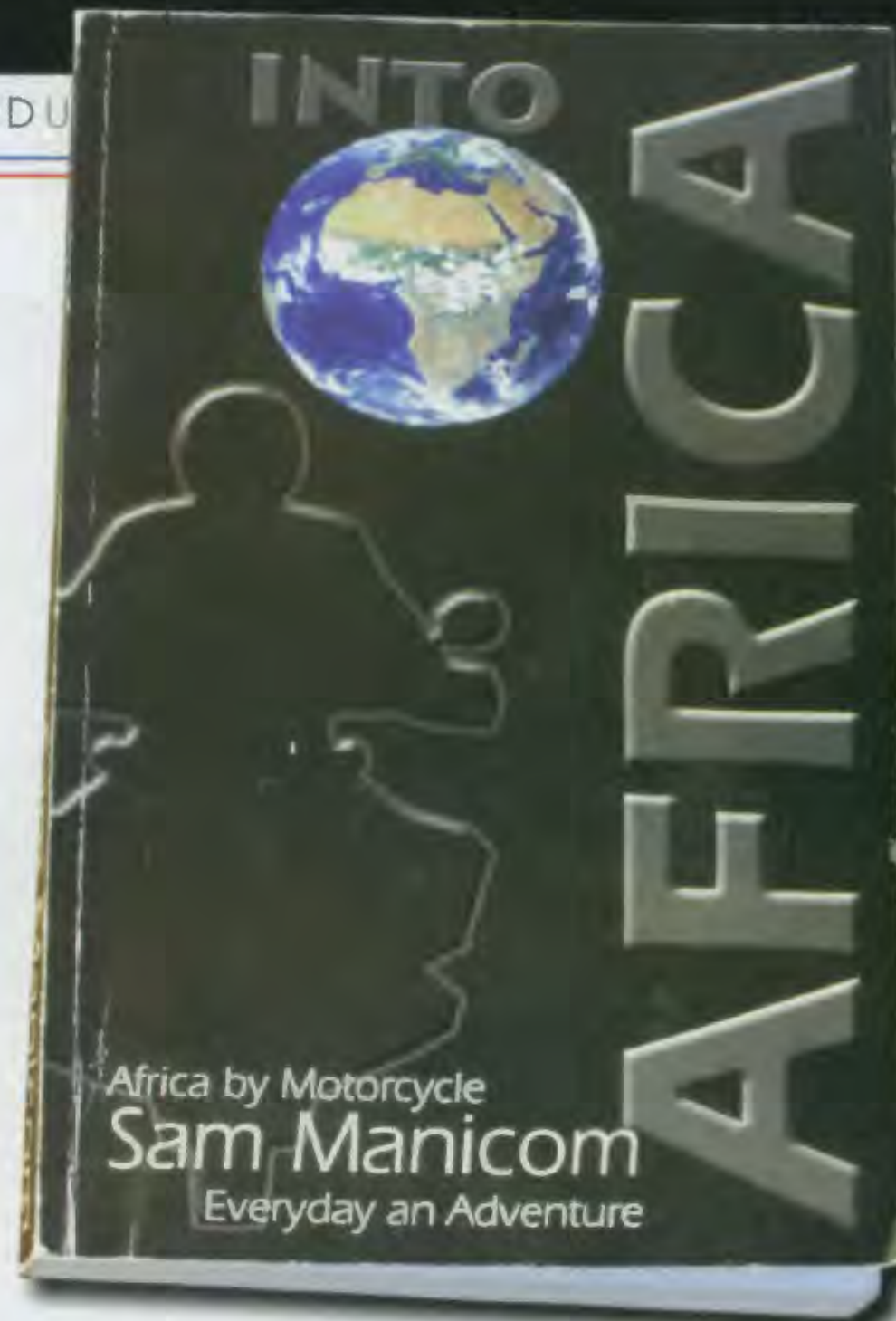
The first page of the book's prologue provided an early opportunity for a paradigm shift: "Many (people) said to me (over the years), 'You're incredibly lucky to have

been able to travel the world, I wish I could.' At first when people said that, my self-centred attitude was 'if I can so can you.' I believed that people generally have the ability to make their lives head in the direction they wish; I was wrong." *Into Africa* is written "for those of you who . . . live in circumstances that may never allow you to ride two wheels into adventure."

**L**ike Sam, I had been inclined to think, "If I can do it so can you." I realize now that I believed, whether consciously or subconsciously, that people have only their own self-limiting attitudes to rise above if they truly want to seek adventure. But that is neither fair nor uniformly true, as Sam observes. His point is well made, and his story reveals not only a spirit of determination but also a significant empathy and respect for his fellow man.

When Sam decided to give his life "a damn good shaking" he chose a BMW R80 GS to do it on. At first a nervous rider, feeling as if he were "riding a drunken pig," Sam soon became a capable rider and seemingly one with the bike (which he eventually named "Libby") after covering 22,000 miles, from Alexandria, Egypt to Durban, South Africa over the course of a year.

**T**he bike gets Sam both into and out of some scrapes and allows him to experience this exotic land at its most basic level. And, although the geography is both challenging and spectacular, it is Africa's people who are the threads weaving this journey into a rich tapestry of a tale. He befriends, and is befriended by, both fellow travelers and locals, resulting in many flavors of camaraderie. Mark Twain said



that "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow mindedness" and this holds true. Towards the end of his journey, Sam realized that "Africa was continuing to change the way I both saw and thought about things."

In retrospect, the challenges seem daunting . . . if one had known,

would the journey ever have begun? But the rewards were great . . . a sky-high stack of experiences that most of us neither will have nor would have imagined if Sam hadn't gone to the trouble.

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