

## Addis Christmas Letter 2017

Cortijo El Aguila

PO Box 30, Jimena de la Frontera

11330 Cadiz, Spain

Yes, for the first time since Methuselah was sucking on a Farley's rusk, we've got just the one address. It's not permanent but we are not planning to be in Hong Kong until at least October next year so I thought I'd save some ink. On which subject, most of you will have received this missive through the miracle of the interweb, for the first time, so won't be reading it if you are anything like me. To those that are, get a cup of coffee and settle down: it's been a busy year.

I was trying to think what has happened so I glanced through my photographs. They are all of small dogs, random leaf specimens and a rapidly rotating water gauge. To these themes of zoophilia, tree bothering and imminent penury I will return anon.



Indigo, a rather fetching blue merle lurcher, arrived at the back end of last year. It took her about 10 minutes to outgrow Lula the border terrier and start terrorising her, driving her to safe spaces under cars or on top of the sofa and, eventually, to Kate's flat in London. So Lula is to be replaced with another lurcher, to be named Inca, and the two I's (will they be better than one?) can tear around with Corky and the horses. Indie, being young and inexperienced, does come out with me for a tramp around our wood from time to time, whereas Lula tends to sit firmly still, particularly if I am

carrying another lifeless tree to plant. I can see her thinking "Why, Jon, why? You don't even connect them together with barbed wire like the other dead trees. You just water them until even you can see they are dead, then dig them up again." I'm looking forward to Inca.

I suppose I should give a little round up of the clan. Corky and I, much the same but spending more time in Spain. Corky is riding lots, including epic traverses of various Sierras, and has acquired an extra 1½ horses making the total 3. Me, one directorship down, after RBS Malaysia did a startling impression of one of my trees and went toes up; still studying forestry. Kate and Charlie, as advertised in the last edition, decamped to Australia in the New Year. That was a huge success for a while. They were set up well in a flat on Manly beach and both got good jobs. Corky and I went with them on a trip from Darwin to Uluru via the Ghan train, Alice Springs and a drive through the MacDonnell ranges. It's a great trip, though the Ghan seems to cater for an average age of about 100. How do half of them get into the top bunks? I think the Ghan must change them for a new lot of oldies at a middle of the night stop so they don't need to sleep. Sadly Charlie's mother has been very ill so he and Kate decided to come back at the end of the summer via a month driving around California in a camper van, as one does. Anyway, they are both well settled back in London with good jobs.



Daniel has finally given up the delights of prep school crowd control and has transferred to Wimbledon High School for Girls, an entirely different set of challenges. He is loving it so far and relishing the higher intellectual content. He has also been elected Captain of the Battersea Ironsides First XV. Captain Dan and his Scurvy Crew are doing OK so far, though a couple of close losses marred the start of the season. He and Esme moved out of Sancroft Court into their own place at the end of the summer,



in time for Kate and Charlie's return and Esme's achievement of a distinction in her MSc and a job at Barts hospital museum (kudos!) Sam, meanwhile, is powering ahead with McCann Erickson, doing advertising account management for big pharma like Glaxo and their ilk. He has started playing rugby again, after spending most of the year hopping around London on his relatively good leg. So far his feet have remained pleasingly parallel to each other and he appears to have reclaimed his place at the base of Daniel's team's scrum. Justine, the ace event organiser, if anyone needs one, has come to a UK visa crux point so is busy trying to negotiate that. We are hoping that the Home

Office realises how much we need her in London.

So, I rather cleverly dealt with one or two of our trips during the last section (do you see how I did that?) There were others though, inevitably. Boring old skiing in the Sierra Nevada and Niseko (been there, done that) but two new countries in the back half of the year! First of all, I went to Ghana on the Bangor University Tropical Forestry Field Trip. We went up to Ashanti, where they appear to have forgiven us for all five of the Anglo Ashanti wars. My favourite is the last, the War of the Golden Stool. The Ashanti had a golden stool that Sir Frederick Hodgson wanted to sit on. The Ashanti didn't want him to so we fought a war. Sir Frederick never got to sit on the stool but the Ashanti, who had hidden it, forgot where it was so it was lost for 20 years until found by road workers in 1920. I suppose we had to stop fighting wars then because we couldn't think of a sillier one. Anyway, I charged around Ashanti province tree-bothering with 30 x 30-year olds who didn't insist on giving me chairs or cocoa or cardigans and it was really fabulous. Ghana is a fantastic country and the Ghanaians are lovely people, though you could pick up litter from time to time, if any of you are reading. Just saying.

Then in October, Corky and I with Mark and Rebecca Whitehead, took a trip along the axis of evil and visited Iran. Cunning bunch those Iranians. You wouldn't know they were evil at all to look at them. They wear the mask all right. Boys and girls hanging around together, laughing, enjoying themselves in the beautiful parks and squares and on the medieval bridges of Isfahan, pretending to be normal people. It's only the fact that one in two young women wear bandages across their noses that reminds you of the domestic abuse and inherent evil that stalks the land. The guide said they were nose jobs but they can't fool me. Though they do end up with enough Angelina Jolie lookalikes for a Tomb Raider convention. It's a most beautiful country, with fertile valleys within mountain ranges that could be Martian, and the most glorious architecture. Great food as well but the booze isn't up to much. Corky and I had a (nearly) Oct-sober to prepare, which was a good idea. On reflection, maybe they put all the evil ones in charge so they are too busy to stop the rest enjoying themselves. It's a theory.



What else? Oh, a great 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary celebration for Corky and me with a bunch of old HSBC mates in Spain. Golf, rides, walks, croquet and champagne! Madness rocked the HK Stadium at the Sevens. Death in the afternoon in the hen coop courtesy of various dogs, foxes and eagles. A quick trip to Portugal courtesy of Cath et al horse sitting. Next year? Well, we are off to Costa Rica in the Spring and possibly Summer as well so I can watch how fast grass grows under trees for my dissertation. Don't worry - I will attach a copy to the next letter. Intensive Spanish courses on that trip too. Corky is off to Brazil in the summer on a riding adventure. And a bunch of us are checking out the Silk Road railway between Beijing and Moscow in May. Then there's Arizona in October for a wedding. In between, we will be hanging around in Spain so try and catch us there. Do come and stay. We have loved our visitors this year. Christmas 2017 has moved to London (with dogs but not horses or hens) so we may catch up with some of you then. Meanwhile, we wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a fantastic 2018.