



Mike Ferris #25490

This edition's Member Profile rather fittingly features an old Launceston Lad.....

Mike Ferris, owner-operator of Ferris Wheels, and Ulysses member No. 25490.

I'm a refugee from the hi-tech industry. Back in the days when it was still nefariously known as The Computer Industry, I was a Programmer with a capital 'P'. Then an Analyst, then a Systems Designer, and through various roles in sales and marketing I eventually became a partner in a small firm.

But I needed something with a bit more buzz. I took 12 months off in '93-'94 because I was drawn to the Himalaya. I got myself involved in an Everest expedition and spent six weeks at Base Camp.

I then found myself in a bar in Kathmandu enjoying a beer with a few other travellers, and a Norwegian guy called Bjorn (seriously!) was lamenting the fact that it was time for him to head home and he would have to sell his motorbike. A 500cc Enfield Bullet! One hour later I owned it.

At the tender age of 37 I had never even sat on the pillion seat of a motorcycle until that fateful afternoon in Kathmandu. I was instantly hooked. He showed me how the beast worked, I paid him the money and then took off to explore the mighty Himalaya on my new pride and joy.

I learnt on the job, so to speak. And I learnt quickly. You don't grab the front brake on a downhill gravel corner having inadvertently selected neutral. This earns you an earful of dust and pebbles when you're dumb enough not to wear a helmet. I was lucky not to be injured on several occasions.

I rode the bike across the border into India (its original home) and found myself in the small Himalayan town of Manali, to be told that the high mountain passes further north had just been cleared of snow and were now open. So I rode there. I arrived in the Ladakhi district capital of Leh where a local pointed up the hill and informed me; the highest road in the world was opened only yesterday. So I rode there. In short, I discovered by accident the route which was to become our Himalayan Heights safari, the flagship tour which I pioneered and which set the benchmark for dozens of future tour operators to emulate.

I took out a three-line classified ad in a couple of bike magazines and my phone went berserk. I remember telling my Dad that I was walking away from a lucrative hi-tech role to run motorbike tours in India, and the pregnant pause on the phone indicated he wasn't fully convinced this was a good career move. But he gradually warmed to the idea. And when I rang him one day to excitedly report that I now had my minimum number of six starters, he said calmly, "Well, actually son you've now got seven". At 65 years of age he had quietly acquired his motorcycle license in order to come with me on the first tour I ran. I took it as a ringing endorsement of my life choices.

After the Himalayan tour immediately proved successful I started tours in Rajasthan using the same Enfield motorcycles. Then with other bike providers I branched out into Turkey in 1999, then Peru in 2001 and we keep adding new destinations every couple of years. The Canadian Rockies and then Morocco soon followed, and Bhutan, Nepal, and the Dalmatian Coast, then more recently Iceland, and our latest addition this year is a trifecta tour of Mexico-Guatemala-Belize.

We enjoy an exceptionally high rate of Repeat Offenders, as we are fond of calling them. We've had many people do 6, 7 or 8 of our destinations. One guy we call Jim the Perennial has done 24 tours with us in 12 years!

I managed to sneak under the Ulysses qualification radar and became a member at the age of 38. But through an oversight I somehow managed to let my membership lapse and when I re-applied, I was unfortunately given a new number which does not reflect my longevity within