



## Long Riders Document Climate Change

Equestrian travel is an ancient activity that is facing an increasing number of climatic threats that jeopardise its continued existence. This is the only investigation of its kind. It reveals 122 years of destructive human activity as witnessed by Long Riders around the world. Ironically the research begins with the first meteorological study, which was created to document the deadly Siberian winter, and concludes with evidence of how Siberia is now on fire.

Brazilian Long Rider Filipe Leite was the first to be asked by the Guild to seek evidence of environmental destruction. What he found was over whelming verification that stretched from Alaska to Patagonia.

Filipe wrote, "I think it's extremely important that the Guild is now documenting climate change because no one sees this problem better than a man or woman on the back of a horse. As Long Riders we are completely immersed in the natural world. We depend on creeks to give our horses water. We depend on pastures to feed them. We are outdoors 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, trekking at 3 km/h and 30 kilometers a day. We don't just see climate change, we feel it!"

This singular analysis provides a unique equestrian summary of ecological events.

# The Cost of Addiction



Our global civilisation is based on the over consumption of fossil fuel. A recent study showed that for the past 50 years, the oil industry has made profits of more than \$1 trillion a year, close to \$3 billion a day. Humanity's addiction to petroleum continues to ensure obscene record corporate profits. In 2022 the Exxon Mobil Corp made \$6.3 billion per hour. Because of a surge in gas prices linked to the war in Ukraine, Shell made a profit of \$40 billion in 2022. Saudi Aramco made a record \$161 billion profit for 2022, the largest profit by an oil company.

While corporate profits were reaching astronomical heights, the lives of billions of average humans were dependent upon automobiles and gasoline for their survival. One climatic event exposed how this dual dependency placed millions of lives at risk.

In 2016 more than a million Floridians were urged to flee the 270-mph winds of Hurricane Matthew which would inflict catastrophic damage. This sparked panic buying of gasoline, with thousands lining up for hours to obtain the precious fuel needed to flee.



Most people heeded the government's dire warnings about the hurricane's ferocity. This resulted in a massive migration that jammed the state's highways. Climate change is worsening hurricane impacts by increasing the intensity and decreasing the speed at which they travel. The most active Atlantic hurricane season on record in terms of total storms took place in 2020, with 30 documented. Yet there is ample evidence of other climate related concerns.

## Snow and Glaciers Disappear

The 19<sup>th</sup> century Long Rider Harry de Windt is the father of equestrian environmental research. In 1890 he saddled up and rode across Persia and Baluchistan. The journey required de Windt to endure inconveniences such as the weather, which ranged from an arctic storm in Persia that froze his cigar to his lips, to a howling desert wind in Baluchistan with temperatures nearing 120 degrees Fahrenheit. The intrepid Long Rider subsequently undertook an even more hair-raising journey. In **1901** he travelled from Paris to New York by land. He left Paris on December 19, 1901 and travelled to Moscow and thence to Yakutsk and the Bering Straits; travelling 11,263 miles and employing 808 horses, 887 reindeer and 114 dogs en route. From East Cape, Bering Straits he travelled to Cape Prince of Wales, Alaska and eventually arrived at New York on August 25, 1902. He had travelled a total distance of 18,494 miles. During his journey de Windt measured the temperature every day at 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. thus creating a detailed "Meteorological Record" that provides an accurate record of weather patterns that no longer exist.



Antarctica (seen right) is losing a billion tons of ice every 40 hours and an average of 150 billion tons per year. Polar ice caps are also melting as global warming causes climate change. Over the past 30 years, the oldest and thickest ice in the Arctic has declined by a stunning 95%. Melting glaciers have accelerated with the resulting melt water accounting for 21% of global sea level rise. Half the planet's glaciers will have melted by 2100, with no glaciers left in Pakistan, Europe, Canada and the US. And a white Christmas will soon become a thing of the past as a sharp reduction in yearly snowfall is rapidly destroying traditional past times such as skiing.

### The consequences of change

1994



2014





## Poisoning the Planet's Water

Modern Long Riders began their campaign to raise awareness when environmentalist William Waterway set off in July **1976** on a 7,500 mile journey designed to “dramatize the problem of water pollution.” The pioneering “Ride for Nature” took the Long Rider through 18 states from California to Maine. He subsequently created the World Waterway Institute, an environmental research lab that studied acid rain and the leaching of metals into drinking water. William, who died in 2015, worked diligently to make the world a better place. He was the author of *“The Holy Order of Water: Healing Earth’s Waters and Ourselves* and never stopped urging us to “reevaluate our interactive relationship with water and the natural world for the good of humanity.”



More than 2 billion people live in water-stressed countries, which are expected to be exacerbated as a result of climate change. Most freshwater resources are either unreachable or too polluted, leaving less than 1% of the world's freshwater readily accessible for direct human use. An unprecedented rise in plastic pollution has been uncovered by scientists, who have calculated that more than 170 trillion plastic particles are afloat in the oceans. Vultures scavenge for food among rubbish, including plastic waste, strewn on a beach near Panama City.



## Biblical Floods

In **1982** CuChullaine O'Reilly rode through the remote and still unspoiled mountains of northern Pakistan. He left his home in Peshawar and began the journey in the flat farm land that surrounds that ancient city. His first night's destination was a farming village called Charsadda.



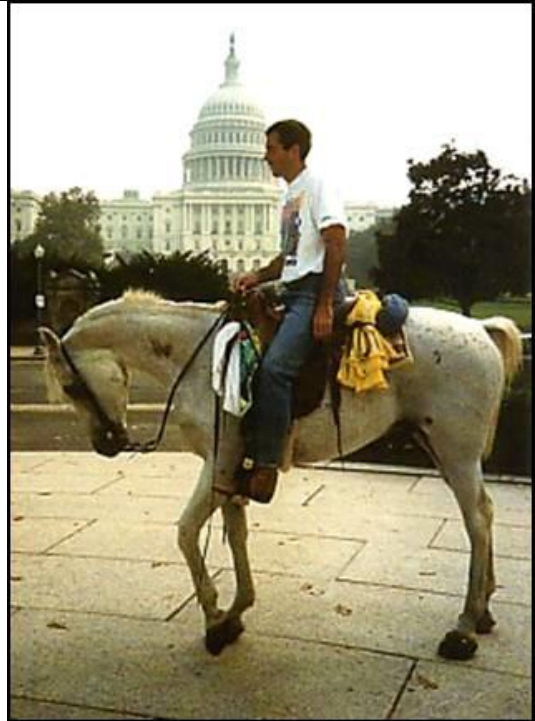
In **2022** a monsoon hit Pakistan. It was 464% more powerful than anything in history. As a result 30% of the country was under water. The village of Charsadda (top right) was drowned. There are other water related dangers, including atmospheric rivers. In **2023** what was described as the rain storm from hell drowned the town of Pajaro, California (bottom right). The climate crisis is also causing sea levels to rise faster than for 3,000 years, which threatens almost a billion people from London to Los Angeles and Bangkok to Buenos Aires. Some nations could cease to exist, drowned under the waves.





## Species Destruction

In **1989** American Long Rider Lucien Spataro rode ocean-to-ocean from Los Angeles to Washington D.C., to raise awareness of his Save the Rainforest protection programme. The author of *Ride Across America; An Environmental Commitment*, Dr. Spataro earned a Ph.D. in Environmental Studies from Ohio University. He warned, "Our footprint is growing larger every day and if we continue to move forward as we are now, we will most certainly find ourselves at an environmental precipice. As we look over the edge, we can see very clearly the impact and we can no longer ignore the fact that our actions are fundamentally altering the planet and those natural systems that support life, as we know it. It is a scary realization but one that represents at the same time a unique and unparalleled opportunity to right the wrongs and rally the global community around a common cause that is inherently more important than anything we will ever do as humans past, present, or future. I have found that everyone really can and does make a difference."



Globally up to one million plant and animal species face extinction because of human activities, says the most comprehensive report yet. The hottest daily highs in summer are the key factor that explains whether a population will survive. Most species won't be able to escape to a cooler climate in order to avoid extinction. Examples include bumblebees that are facing mass extinction. Scientists estimate that two-thirds of American bird species will not survive. In addition the World Wildlife Fund states that 18 million acres of forest disappear every year. Large portions of the Amazonian rainforest (right) have been destroyed to allow cultivation of soy, which is fed to cows, pigs, and chickens that supply the insatiable human demand for meat.



## Environmental Refugees

The province of Darien lies along the eastern edge of Panama. The jungle endures one of the world's highest rainfalls. On the other side of an invisible border, Columbia's Atrato River pours its waters into impenetrable swamps. The hazards are legendary. That portion known as the Rio Atrato swamp is thirty miles wide. Swiss Long Rider Aime Tschiffely wrote, "Experts informed me that it is utterly impossible to make the trip across the Darien. These regions are vast swamps and virgin forests, many of which have never been trodden by human foot. To attempt to this crossing would be a foolhardy enterprise in which both horses and rider would perish." The terrible Darien Gap jungle remained so dangerous that Tschiffely avoided it in 1926 and French Long Rider Jean Francois Ballereau also went around it in 1987. In **1990** Russian Long Rider Vladimir Fissenko negotiated his way across the deadly Darien Gap morass.



According to the UN's International Organization of Immigration 250,000 refugees, including small children and infants, crossed the Darien Gap in 2023. The area is now controlled by criminal groups known for acts of violence, sexual abuse and robbery. "The stories we have heard from those who have crossed the Darien Gap attest to the horrors of this journey," said a UN official. Climate refugees are people who must leave their homes and communities because of the effects of climate change. Since 2008 318 million people around the world have been forcibly displaced by floods, windstorms, earthquakes or droughts, 30 million in **2020** alone. This is equivalent to one person being displaced every second. According to the UN extreme weather, rising seas and damaged ecosystems will result in 1 billion climate refugees by 2050.



## Deadly Heat

During his 6,000 mile journey from Mongolia to Hungary in **2004** Australian Long Rider Tim Cope endured life threatening heat. The temperature climbed to 124 degrees Fahrenheit (51 degrees Celsius) during his summer time crossing of Kazakhstan. To survive, Tim would rise at 3 a.m. and be in the saddle and on the move by 5. By 9 a.m. Tim recalled, “you are wondering if that morning’s cool air was just a dream or not.”



Modern society’s continued reliance on fossil fuels is warming the world at an unprecedented pace. A study by the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change confirmed that the planet is hotter than it has been in 125,000 years. The world’s eight hottest years in recorded history have all come since 2014. In July **2021** Kazakhstan endured the highest temperatures on record. The blistering heat wave killed thousands of horses. Cities such as Jacobabad, Pakistan are now passing 50 degrees Celsius (122 F) when the heat and humidity thresholds are hotter than the human body can survive.





## Drought

In **2017** Brazilian Long Rider Filipe Leite witnessed the effects of extreme drought on the fabled grasslands of Argentina. “As a Long Rider, I have seen and felt the effects of climate change first hand. During my rides from Alaska to Argentina, I was forced to ride my horses through wildfires, dry creeks and unforgiving and unpredictable weather. What I saw left me with a deep feeling of sadness but it also made me want to do everything possible to help save our planet.”



When temperatures rise water evaporates more quickly. Drought conditions have worsened, and expanded across vast portions of the continental U.S. The Great Salt Lake in Utah has dropped to its lowest level on record. The rapidly shrinking lake, which is predicted to disappear within five years, is a short distance from the city. The dry lake bed is exposing arsenic and mercury. These toxins are being blown onto residents. An ecologist at Brigham Young University called it “one of the worst environmental disasters in modern US history.” Utah’s Great Salt Lake can be seen in 1987 and **2022**.



## Wild Fires

More than a century after Harry de Windt rode across the frozen wastes of Siberia, in **2019** Nikita Gretski began training for a winter equestrian journey across Yakutia. However that summer the region of the planet which is famous for its minus 60 degree cold was the victim of an enormous wild fire. Russian authorities reported that 7.4 million acres; 30,000 kilometres, were on fire, an area roughly the size of Belgium. Ironically when Nikita rode across Siberia in the winter of **2022** his greatest concern wasn't fire; it was lack of water. "My idea of the environment was out of touch with reality. I rode into what I thought would be pristine wilderness. Instead I came across 300 kilometres of land that had been destroyed by gold mining. The rivers were so polluted with poisonous chemicals that all trace of wildlife was gone. I rode for weeks through utter grayness, boiling snow or looking for obscure streams to aid my thirsty horses. Water became as precious as gold dust. The experience motivated me to protect the environment any way I can."



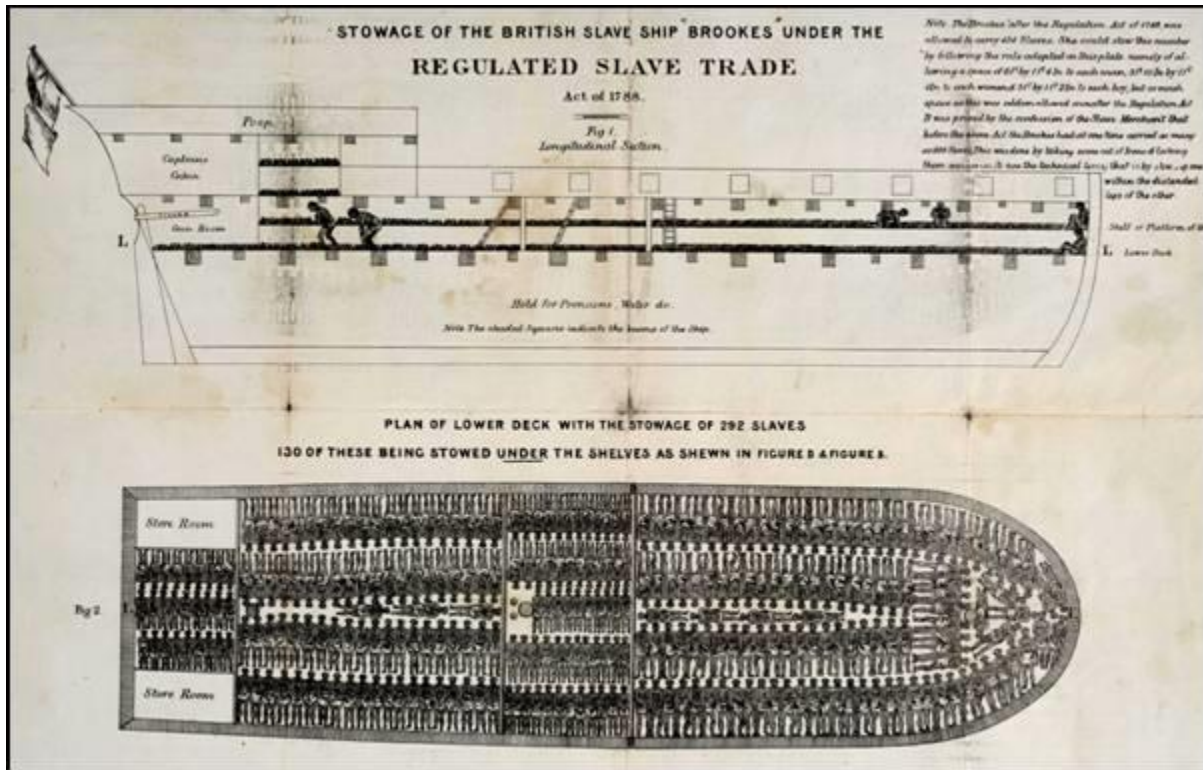
Europe endured a record amount of fire damage in **2022** and record-breaking wildfires ravaged the Western U.S. But Siberia is experiencing a continuously worsening trend known as boreal fires which occur on peaty landscapes such as the Siberian taiga. What was for centuries frozen permafrost is melting and millions of acres are burning. In 2021 19,300 square miles (500,000 square kilometers) of vegetation was on fire, This caused a plume of smoke 930 miles (1,500 km) long that reached the polar circle.





# Humanity Has Two Choices

## Action and Faith



This is not the first time that humanity has been forced to confront a problem of global dimensions that involves the survival of millions. History provides an extraordinary Long Rider example of courage and conviction.

Thomas Clarkson was the son of an English clergyman who lived in a time (1760-1846) when it was legal to buy and sell slaves. In 1785 Clarkson entered an essay contest which was to change the course of history. The topic of the Cambridge University competition was "Is it Lawful to Make Slaves of Others Against Their Will?" Clarkson not only read first-hand accounts of the slave trade, he also interviewed those with eyewitness experiences. His powerful essay won the first prize.

During his ride from Cambridge back to his London home Clarkson became deeply disturbed by the magnitude and inhumanity of institutionalised slavery. What had been a detached intellectual challenge unexpectedly became an intense personal ethical dilemma.

"I became seriously affected while upon the road. I stopped my horse, dismounted and walked. I frequently tried to persuade myself that the contents of my Essay could not be true. However the more I reflected upon the authorities on which they were founded, the more I gave them credit. I sat down disconsolate on the turf by the roadside and held my horse. Here a thought came into my mind, that if the contents of the Essay were

true, it was time some person should see these calamities to their end. Agitated in this manner I reached home," he wrote.

After undergoing a spiritual transformation during this equestrian journey, the young Long Rider took on the might of the British Empire by devoting his life to abolishing the slave trade! Clarkson swung back into the saddle and rode 10,000 miles to lecture across the country about the urgent need to abolish slavery.

In addition to interviewing thousands of sailors who had participated in the evil trade, Clarkson gathered a gruesome collection of thumbscrews, branding irons and other instruments of torture. He also had a drawing made of the British slave ship, *Brookes*, (above) which he published in 1791. He displayed this drawing and these cruel implements during the hundreds of lectures he gave.

Like modern petroleum companies, the slave traders represented a highly lucrative business that had deep ties to the government. When Clarkson rode into Liverpool in 1787, a mob of sailors were paid to assassinate the activist. The Long Rider was attacked and barely escaped being killed.

Regardless of the power of his influential enemies, Clarkson continued to expose the evils of the slave trade. His travels inspired the creation of anti-slavery societies which in turn delivered nearly a thousand protest petitions to parliament demanding the emancipation of slaves.

Thomas Clarkson helped create the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, helped achieve passage of the Slave Trade Act which ended British trade in slaves, helped pass the Slavery Abolition Act which outlawed slavery in British colonies, and organised the Society for the Promotion of Permanent and Universal Peace.

One Long Rider and a horse did all that!



## or Apathy and Denial



It is easy to misplace our priorities and let the trivialities of daily life lull us into forgetting how vulnerable we are. It is tempting to compromise our personal safety by maintaining a blind allegiance to technology whose flaws are consistently ignored.

In the past equestrian travel was threatened by political repression because Long Riders have often been social dissidents. They don't like to be controlled. They are highly individualistic. They enjoy the freedom to roam at will. They aren't afraid of speaking their mind. They are a potent symbol of personal independence, resistance to oppression and defiance of the power of the state.

Yet something more fundamental is at risk. Without water and grass horses and humans will no longer be able to travel together as they have for thousands of years.

The cycle of events shapes each generation. Long Rider Nikita Gretschi shared his concerns. "The thing that struck me is that Harry de Windt shows us how this began and makes you realise that this issue has been slowly brewing like a super volcano. Each generation has hoped it won't explode in their era but eventually the time will come because this isn't an issue restricted to one part of the world. This is happening all over the planet indiscriminately."

Like Thomas Clarkson we too are confronted with over whelming evidence, only instead of slavery we are confronting dangerous daily evidence of pervasive global climatic disaster. Humanity is playing Russian roulette and billions of lives are at stake. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century slavers demonstrated, those addicted to profit are not interested in the lives of humans they deem inferior and expendable.

That is why a group of 2,000 Swiss women who are more than 64 years old are suing their government, claiming its failure to act on the climate crisis is violating their individual human rights. And the nation of Vanuatu introduced a resolution to the UN, co-sponsored by more than 100 other nations, calling for the International Court of

Justice to enforce international law against polluting violator nations whose predatory practices endanger the survival of other humans.

Each human has to confront their personal fears. Will you be cursed by posterity because you kept quiet, did nothing and hoped to survive? Or will you use your life to try and stop this planet wide destruction?

Think long and hard because soon there will nothing left but memories and Mother Nature's judgment.



*[CuChullaine O'Reilly](#) is the Founder of the [Long Riders' Guild](#), the Executor of the [Tschiffely Literary Estate](#) and the Director of the [Long Riders' Guild Press](#). An award winning journalist, O'Reilly has spent more than forty-years investigating equestrian exploration and history. He is the author of [The Encyclopaedia of Equestrian Exploration](#) and [The Horse Travel Handbook](#).*