

An African Adventure to Aid Spinal Research

On 7 November 2005, despite paralysis from the shoulders down, 25-year-old Colin Javens embarked on a gruelling five-month passage through Africa. Colin's aim is to raise money for research into spinal cord repair and to demonstrate how technology has enabled him to overcome many of the limitations of paralysis.

Colin is the first person with this level of paralysis to attempt such an expedition and is driving from Stoke Mandeville hospital, across Europe and through remote and sometimes perilous areas of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana and South Africa. Armed with specially adapted Land Rovers and modified camping equipment, Colin has access to unique specialist technology, designed by Avanade (a joint venture technology services company from Accenture and Microsoft) to combat hazardous terrain, potential hijack and limited communications.

The expedition website is updated by the UK team, on receipt of materials submitted by Colin himself, as the expedition unfolds.

Colin was born in Kenya, where he lived for six years on a farm. After his father was killed in a raid he moved with his family to Lamuru just outside Nairobi, then in 1986 came to live in the UK. Colin lived an active, outdoor lifestyle and travelled abroad when possible, taking part in trips to Mexico, Australia, Alaska and Tanzania. One year into an agricultural degree at Harper Adams, on holiday in the Isle of Wight, Colin dived into the sea to rescue a friend's binoculars. The sea was too shallow and Colin broke his neck, seriously damaging three vertebrae.

There was little the doctors could do. Colin remained in a high dependency ward for one month facing the prospect of being paralysed from the shoulders down (tetraplegic), wheelchair bound and reliant on help for the rest of his life. Colin was determined to get on and live life to

the full and left hospital after 364 days having vowed to be out within a year of the accident.

In the intervening three years since 'escaping' hospital Colin has been skiing and kayaking and has even learnt to drive again. The Driving Home expedition across Africa is the next step to maximise his independence and to fulfil the ambition he had before his accident. The expedition is accompanied by a doctor who will continually monitor Colin's health. Not being able to feel anything below his shoulders removes his awareness of injury such as cuts and sores. Colin is also unable to regulate his body temperature and will have to avoid the midday heat. Stoke Mandeville Hospital are overseeing the expedition to ensure all medical needs are met, and will be offering advice en route if needed through the IT solution.

For further details about the expedition, please see www.drivinghome.co.uk.

