

The world beneath your seat

'The plane,' writes the author and philosopher Alain de Botton in his book *The Art of Travel*, 'is a symbol of worldliness, carrying within itself a trace of all the lands it has crossed; its eternal mobility offering an imaginative counterweight to feelings of stagnation and confinement.'

Passengers leaving London's Heathrow airport bound for Johannesburg, on their way to this summer's World Cup finals in South Africa, may not be inclined to regard the 12 hours that they will spend in the air as offering either freedom or enlightenment. Even the lucky few ensconced in business class, where the luxury of leg room might allow for more expansive thinking, are doubtful to see the flight itself as a particularly interesting stage of their travels, despite the fact that they will be flying above some of the most spectacular terrain on Earth.

While the journey might seem like a pause in their day-to-day routines, the world they've temporarily left behind never really stops; beneath them on this 9,000-kilometre haul is enough human and natural drama to rival any in-flight entertainment. The narrative that lies along the route has yet to be covered by any guidebook, but this year, the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) has begun to capture it in Hidden Journeys, a unique online application designed to entertain, engage and inform the most inquisitive of travellers. Combining content from the Society's unrivalled geographical collections with satellite imagery and photography, it allows users to explore the people, places and environments that exist beneath three popular international flightpaths – Heathrow to Johannesburg, Vancouver and New Dehli – from what you might see at ground level, right up to 35,000 feet.



coastal defences and chalky white cliffs, the neat contours of this thin stretch of water appear in stark contrast to the scene nine hours and 7,400 kilometres later, when Africa's Zambezi River thunders into view.

At 3,540 kilometres in length, the Zambezi drains an area of 1.3 million square kilometres, more than twice the size of France. Bringing life to the dusty floodplains and sandy plateaus along the border of Zambia and Angola, it provides fish and fertile soils for local people, but prolonged and early rainy seasons in the past decade have led to devastating floods in higher areas that were once thought to be safe.

These are just two snapshots of the hidden journey from London to Johannesburg, an ever-developing film that – from Lake Geneva in the Alps to the Makgadikgadi salt pans in Botswana and the Congo's rapidly depleting rainforests – reveals startling natural and manmade impacts on the landscape in every frame.

If you've ever visited any of

What better way to think about the wonders of our changing world than by creating a catalogue of amazing journeys that everyone can share?

Look out of the window after 30 minutes en route to Johannesburg, and you'll find yourself high above the world's busiest shipping lane. Hosting up to 400 vessels a day and only 33 kilometres wide at its narrowest point, the English Channel was created 450,000 years ago when a series of catastrophic floods created deep valleys in a natural land bridge between England and France. From the engineering triumph of its undersea tunnel to its decades-old

the countries mentioned and would like to contribute images to the project, visit www.rgs.org/hiddenjourneys to learn more.

As de Botton says: 'Journeys are the midwives of thought. Few places are more conducive to internal conversations than a moving plane, ship or train.' What better way to think about the wonders of our changing world than by creating a catalogue of amazing journeys that everyone can share?

Join the **SOCIETY** get the **MAGAZINE**

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) promotes enjoyment and understanding of our world. Membership is open to all. You may use geography in your profession, have a thirst for geographical knowledge or a passion for travel. *Geographical* is the Society's magazine and is available as part of membership. To find out more, call the Membership Office on 020 7591 3080





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The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is a leading world centre for geographers and geographical learning. One of our aims is to stimulate the awareness and enjoyment of the subject to a diverse range of people.

Geography is about the understanding of the people, places and environments of our world, the processes by which they are changing, and the interconnections between them – both locally and globally.

The Society carries out a wide range of activities to support these aims. We support research groups; promote geography within the national curriculum; produce scholarly publications; provide training in scientific field techniques and expeditions; offer information through our large map collection, library and picture library, and engage the wider public through our popular national lecture series.

TO FIND OUT ABOUT JOINING THE SOCIETY, PLEASE CONTACT US ON
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SELECTION OF EVENTS



APRIL 2010

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19 APRIL, 6.30PM

UNCOVERING THE SECRETS OF PAPUA'S ANCIENT TRIBAL TRADE ROUTE

(Lecture, London)

Will Millard, leader of the Society's Neville Shulman Challenge Award project in 2009, describes his inspiring trek along the Jalan Raya (Great Road), an ancient inter-tribal trade route in the highlands of Indonesian Papua, and shares what he learned on the way.

i Free for RGS-IBG members and guests only



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19 APRIL, 2.30PM

BE INSPIRED... AN INTRODUCTION TO EARLY MOUNTAINEERING CINEMATOGRAPHY

(Afternoon talk, London)

Jan Faull of the British Film Institute will give this talk, intended to inspire you to use items from the Society's collections to inform your own photography and film-making.

Venue: Education Centre, RGS-IBG.
i Tickets free to RGS-IBG members and educational users; non-members, £5 payable in advance. Pre-booking is required. For more details, contact 020 7591 3044 or showcase@rgs.org

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21 APRIL, 7PM

DISCOVERING PEOPLE... MIKE GOOLEY

(Interview series, London)

Join Simon Calder in conversation with former SAS officer Mike Gooley, founder of Trailfinders. Hear what drives him and how he turned his passion for travel into a world-class business success.

i Tickets: RGS-IBG members £7; non-members £10. To book, contact the Events Office on events@rgs.org or 020 7591 3100, or book online at www.rgs.org/whatson

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23 APRIL, 7PM

AFGHANISTAN: RHETORIC AND REALITY

(Lecture, Penrith)

In 2002, Rory Stewart walked across Afghanistan from Herat to Kabul. Returning in 2006, he founded Turquoise Mountain, an NGO that's regenerating the country's traditional arts and historic areas to create jobs, skills and a renewed sense of national identity. Venue: Ullswater Community College, Penrith CA11 8NG.

i Tickets: RGS-IBG members free; non-members £5 on the door. For details, contact the Events Office on events@rgs.org or 020 7591 3100

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26 APRIL, 7PM

ARE WE LETTING OUR HERITAGE SLIP AWAY ON THE JURASSIC COAST?

(Lecture, Exeter)

Hear Dr Anjana K Ford on the Jurassic Coast, an area that records 185 million years of geological time, where erosion maintains natural beauty and scientific interest but threatens communities that live and work there. Joint event with the Geographical Association. Venue: Exeter School, Victoria Park Road, Exeter EX2 4NS.

i For details, contact the Events Office on events@rgs.org or 020 7591 3100

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27 APRIL

REPORTING LIVE FROM THE END OF THE WORLD

(Lecture, London)

From a whaling ship to an Antarctic crevasse and the Amazon rainforest, BBC reporter David Shukman has pioneered live broadcasting from the frontlines of environmental change all over the globe. Venue: Clothworkers' Hall, Dunster Court, Mincing Lane, London EC3R 7AH.

i Free for RGS-IBG members and guests only. This is a repeat of the 26 April lecture at the Society. For further details, contact the Events Office on events@rgs.org or 020 7591 3100