

the little READ

■ Just back from a 490-mile trek on a pilgrims' route in France and Spain with her sister, Simone, **CHARLOTTE SULLIVAN-GILBURY** is already in training for a marathon, and planning her next adventure. Charlotte, 22, lives in Plymstock



ACTIVE: Charlotte Sullivan-Gilbury, right, with her sister Simone

Pilgrims' progress

IF I WEREN'T TALKING TO YOU...

I'd be reading a book on the train. I'm on my way back to Leicester University.

I'M GOOD AT...

Languages. I'm studying French, Spanish and Italian.

I'M BAD AT...

Remembering things. I'm quite forgetful. I have to write everything down.

WE CHOSE THE WAY OF ST JAMES HIKE BECAUSE...

It's almost on our doorstep and I know Spain a bit but I wanted to see a different side of Spain. I'm not religious – you don't have to be religious to do it.

MY NEXT CHALLENGE...

Is to run a marathon, which I'm doing in aid of the British Heart Foundation. The girl I share a house with, who is doing the race with me, lost both of her grandfathers to heart problems.

THE ADVENTURE I'D MOST LIKE TO DO...

Is a cycle from Land's End to John O'Groats which I hope to do with my mum. And I'd like to do another Way of St James route. There are lots, but I'd like to do the one starting in Lisbon.

THE BEST THING ABOUT

DOING LONG-DISTANCE ROUTES IS...

Just getting away from the hustle and bustle of the city. The route we did can be busy, but some days we did not see anybody for seven hours. You just think about the walking.

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP I WANTED TO BE...

A baker, then I changed to wanting to do something sporty and then I changed to languages because I thought I could get a better job.

IN TEN YEARS' TIME I WANT TO BE...

A translator, hopefully.

WHEN I'M NOT STUDYING I...

Work in a shop and play hockey.

MY FAVOURITE POSSESSIONS ARE...

My two giant African snails, St James and Bubba.

PLYMOUTH'S GREAT BECAUSE...

We used to live in Kingsbridge and I love it that there's frequent buses and everything you need is close. I love the Barbican and the Hoe.

BUT IF I COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT THE CITY...

I'd get the airport back.

Discovering a modest man of the world

YOU know where you are with explorer Robin Hanbury-Tenison: high on Bodmin Moor – and in a rainforest... somewhere.

He might be lost in thought.

He might even be lost, full stop (Robin is not a believer in GPS navigation).

But he will always have his feet on the ground, whether at home on his farm on the Cornish moor or away on an expedition.

Hailed as one of the greatest explorers of the 20th century, he takes his passion – preservation; of the rainforest, of the lives of tribal people and of the British countryside – seriously, but not himself.

He is not one to puff up his chest at the praise heaped on him by others.

And he has been showered with honours: the latest came this week, a doctorate of science degree awarded by Plymouth University, adding to an OBE, his gold medal from the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) and International Fellowship of the Explorers Club and many others.

They come on the back of a dizzying array of achievements.

He has been on over 30 expeditions, including as leader of the RGS's largest in its history, taking 115 scientists to study the rainforests of Sarawak, Borneo (1977/8). The research and his book, Mulu: The Rainforest, started the international concern for tropical rainforests.

Robin also made the first land crossing of South America at its widest point (1958) and the first north-south traverse of the continent by river (1964/5).

Closer to home – a 2,000-acre farm near Mount on the southern edge of Bodmin Moor – in the mid-1990s he led the British Field Sports Society during its transformation into the Countryside Alliance, the greatest champion of the rural landscape and way of life.

"I am hugely honoured by the Plymouth University degree," he says.

"I accepted it because I have been lucky enough to have been involved in some great causes and some successes. But that is more good luck than good management.

"Somebody is going to take the credit so it might as well be me," he adds, smiling.

"Any credit that comes my way is taken on behalf of others.

"I just happen to have done remarkable things because I happened to be around, and in the right place, at the right time.

"As Napoleon said, 'It is better to be lucky than clever.'"

Don't dwell too much on the "20th-century great" tag (put there by The Sunday Times 30-odd years ago, which described him then as the leading explorer of the previous two decades). He is very much active in the 21st century, even at the age of 76.

But for the late postponement of an expedition by an Exeter University team, Robin would have been heading deep into the interior of Borneo next month.

Instead he is focusing on an expedition in February to Burma, now that the country is opening up as the military dictatorship loosens its grip. "There is an area of rainforest there which has not been explored scientifically for 20 years," he says with the kind of enthusiasm you would expect only from somebody a couple of decades younger.



Picture by EMILY WICKFIELD WICKS

At the age of 76, world-renowned explorer **ROBIN HANBURY-TENISON** is planning his next expedition with typical enthusiasm. Martin Freeman finds out what makes him tick

In the meantime there is his writing to keep him busy.

He has five books on the go, which will take to 29 the total he has written or edited. One of the latest crop is Echoes Of A Vanished World, a window on the past through the lens of his camera. The large-format, collectors' limited edition (of 30) contains photographs from his expeditions of the 1950s and 1960s, mainly of tribal people whose way of life is under threat or has gone forever.

Few will be able to afford to buy a

limited edition – they are on sale at an eye-watering price of £1,000 – although a more modestly scaled and priced version is available. Photos from the book will be shown in London at the National Theatre's Olivier exhibition space early next year.

The exhibition and book may mark a watershed in his life as he hopes the publicity will encourage somebody to buy his collection of artefacts from his travels. The hundreds of pieces range from a decorated ostrich egg (which was used as a water canteen) to a pair



WINNING SMILES: 'A jolly picture of me on an early expedition in Borneo with some young Penan,' says Robin. Left: a decorated ostrich egg which he used as a water canteen. Right: the photo from the cover of Robin's new book, Echoes Of A Vanished World, a girl on the Tinjat River in Sarawak, Borneo. Below: Robin at home in Cornwall with his dog Jenny



Picture below by MARTIN FREEMAN

of Tuareg sandals, given to him by the people he met.

The proceeds will go to Survival International, the charity devoted to lobbying for indigenous people throughout the world, which he co-founded in 1969.

"Some of them (the pieces) have no great intrinsic value, but as a collection, if it went through Sotheby's or Christie's, it might fetch a considerable sum.

"I would take £10,000 for the lot, tomorrow. My hope is that some uni-

versity somewhere with an ethnographic collection will take the lot. Perhaps that is a straw in the wind, but that is what I hope will happen.

"It is the right time for me to sell. My children don't have the same interest in them and they could become a burden.

"I would hate for them to end up in some junk shop.

"Some of them are fragile and deteriorating. They need to be kept in a museum.

"I could not sell them for myself.

That would be rather distasteful as they were given to me.

"I want to sell them for Survival as I would like to give something back."

He is being modest there. Many would argue that he has been giving back since he first went exploring, with his tireless championing through Survival.

His first trip was after university when he went overland from London to Sri Lanka.

"I suppose it was about running away," he muses.

What was he fleeing?

"What people always run away from: life, responsibility."

When responsibility did come along, the adventures and the exploration continued.

He was married, first, to Marika Hopkinson, the food writer, who died in 1982, by whom he has a daughter, Lucy, and a son, Rupert.

In 1983 he married Louella Edwards, who has two sons, Harry and Peter. They have a son, Merlin.

Louella has accompanied him on several expeditions – like him, she is an accomplished rider; he prefers to travel by horse whenever he can. Marika also travelled far and wide with Robin.

He was fortunate to enjoy private means: he inherited a farm in East Anglia which he "swapped" for the land and house on Bodmin Moor half a century ago because it reminded him of the Irish countryside in which he spent his formative years.

Although he is associated with the countryside and wilderness he was born in central London.

He could describe himself as a Cockney – he was born within the sound of Bow bells – but that wouldn't fit with his accent (well-to-do English).

He grew up in County Monaghan, on the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish republic.

"My family had an estate there," he says. "I used to sleep in a tree house on an island in a lake.

"It was a Swallows and Amazons-like childhood," he adds, comparing his early years to the jolly adventures in Arthur Ransome's books.

"I went away to Eton to school and then to Oxford to read philosophy."

Among the towers and in the ancient halls a further desire for adventure took hold of his imagination. He and two friends, John Hemming and Richard Mason, decided they would become explorers.

Canadian Hemming became an expert on the Incas and the native people of the Amazon basin, was director of the Royal Geographical Society for 11 years and co-founder of Survival.

Mason, too, became an explorer. He was with Robin on the 1958 trans-South American expedition. In 1961 he became the last Englishman to have been killed by an uncontacted tribe.

"They were travelling in an area of central Brazil where they had been told there were no uncontacted tribes – they had no intention of seeking any out. Unfortunately that information was incorrect. He was ambushed and clubbed to death."

Mason and Hemming were following the code adopted by explorers who encounter tribal people. "Die if you must, but never kill," says Robin.

As for the dangers that he has encountered on his own expeditions, "it's difficult just to pull one out from memory.

"Why talk about them? They didn't happen, did they?"

"I have always had ingrained in me the idea that if you cannot afford anything to go wrong, then it will not."

He has always chosen warmer regions for his destinations, "because the cold is just not me."

He adds: "I have the greatest admiration for those who go into the polar regions, who live for month after month in temperatures three times as cold as a domestic freezer.

"Mind you, they say to me, 'how can you stand the rainforest with the insects, the snakes, the piranhas and so on?' It is horses for courses."

His explorations began before the age of mass global tourism, which begs a few questions. Is there anything still to explore? Isn't everywhere available to visit digitally through a few clicks on Google Maps? And what is an explorer anyway – how does he or she differ from a traveller?

Last, first. "An explorer is difficult to define," he says. Difficult as in requiring some explanation (he has written three books on the subject). "A tourist lies in the sun, not thinking about anything," he says. "A traveller thinks about what they are seeing and tells the world about it.

"An explorer changes the world through their travels, in that they change what we know about the world or how we see the world." That means that to explore you do not have to go to a region which is unvisited, and so there is plenty to explore.

Others, such as mountaineers who scale unclimbed peaks, are sports people, while adventurers who tick off outlandish "firsts" also earn his respect in that they challenge what we think a human being can achieve.

Science underpins his own travels, and that over-arching concern for the environment and sustainable living. (He practises what he preaches: his farm has solar panels and a large wind turbine.)

The central point is that sustainability applies as much to the UK countryside as it does to wildernesses, he says. The landscapes of our islands need careful management. "An example is Bodmin Moor. There was over-stocking but that has been followed in some areas by the removal of too many grazing animals. Head-high gorse has invaded which is no good for walkers or for wildlife."

He is "deeply pessimistic" about modern man's ability to get it right.

"It is very frustrating. We have most of the answers on how to live in harmony with the environment, but desertification, over-population and pollution continue and we are doing nothing about them."

And while we have more knowledge today than we did 50-odd years ago when he first went travelling, "we don't know it all. Nor do we know what we are losing, almost daily, as yet another species becomes extinct.

"It's not just that the rainforest might be bloody useful, it's that we are losing species and we don't even know what they do.

"So many species are symbiotic. They work together. You take one element out and the ripple effect means that others go, too.

"There might be a (species of) monkey that is the only propagator of a plant. When those monkeys go, so

does the plant. You lose the insects that live on that plant and you lose the plants that those insects propagate." That is one reason for getting out into the wilderness: to fill the gaping gaps in our still-limited knowledge about the world's species.

So much conservation is about intelligent management, he says: trusting the people who know best how to live sustainably – the tribal communities.

Interference by those from outside who think they know best can have awful consequences. A UK example being the introduction of grey squirrels that carry squirrel pox, to which the native reds have no immunity. "When I moved to Cornwall 50 years ago the greys had not crossed the Tamar," he says. "It is a pleasure to see the red squirrels returning." He is president of the Cornwall Red Squirrel Project, which is re-introducing the native species.

So much for nature and science. How about a celebrity anecdote from over half a century of travelling?

He was on honeymoon with Marika in Jamaica when he met a Hungarian baron (as you do) who suggested they continue their break on the "wonderful" island of Cuba.

"And so we went," says Robin, "and found there was a revolution going on – I had no idea."

The couple bumped into Errol Flynn, the Australian-born American actor known for his swashbuckling roles. "He had been fighting on the rebels' side and was regarded as a hero of Castro's revolution.

"One day he commandeered a milk cart with six mules, invited us on board and we raced through Havana, milk sloshing about and the people cheering him, like a scene from one of his films.

"From then on we could do no wrong because we were 'El Flynn's amigos'."

It's an image to savour and one that fits the pioneering spirit Robin shows but which is a quality that somehow belongs in an earlier century.

Take his views on GPS, for example. He is not against the internet, rather he applauds the network for its learning and communication opportunities. In fact he cites Google Maps as evidence that the fate of indigenous people and their environment is entwined.

"You can zoom in and see where the rainforest has survived – it coincides with the areas where tribal people have been left to thrive."

But he disapproves of navigation by satellite.

Although not one for unnecessary risk-taking – see his comments above about avoiding danger – he sees GPS as a hindrance, not a help.

"I stirred things up with my views at the Royal Geographical Society when this topic cropped up," he says.

"GPS is a complete disaster to a large part of the reason for exploration, which is to get lost."

■ Robin Hanbury-Tenison's exhibition Echoes Of A Vanished World, A Lifetime In Pictures will be in the Olivier space at the National Theatre, South Bank, London, from January 14 to March 10 next year. Admission will be free. Copies of Echoes Of A Vanished World are available from www.robinsbooks.co.uk at £14.99.