



The team must fit in training around their busy work schedules and family commitments.

Middle-aged Men in Lycra

Amateur cyclists to pedal 320km in aid of disaster-stricken survivors

“As keen cyclists, we wanted to put our hobby to good effect and help others”.

By **Julian Ryall**
Photos: **Ivan Doherty**

Ten British cyclists—who happily describe themselves as keen amateurs—are to cycle 320km from Tokyo to Fukushima Prefecture to raise funds for the disaster-hit residents of Minamisoma.

The event emerged from discussions during Brits at Lunch, a monthly lunch for expats. Ways were considered in which the British community in Tokyo might assist those affected by the worst natural disaster in living memory to strike Japan.

The city of Minamisoma was devastated by the massive tsunami that was triggered by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. Even today, some 7,000 residents—a great deal of them elderly—are living in temporary housing units and many have no source of income.

The cyclists aim to raise ¥1mn and plan to donate all the funds to the Save Minamisoma Project (SMP), which makes regular deliveries of food and water from Tokyo to the city.

“Many of us are long-term expats in Japan. We love the country and wanted to give something back”, said Robert Williams, senior investment advisor at IFG Asia Limited. “We hope [the charity



Robert Williams



Tony Collins



Dave Lawrence



Ian Smith



Chris Page

project] improves a, perhaps, tarnished image of foreigners fleeing after the tsunami. It's an opportunity to make an immediate and tangible difference to other people's lives outside our normal work environments.

"The Save Minamisoma Project is a foreigner-inspired endeavour set up in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, so it was a good fit for us as British expats", Williams said. "We know that the money raised for SMP is used within a few weeks to deliver food and water to the town's residents.

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Williams—who recalls being "thrashed around" on the eighth floor of an elderly office building when the quake struck—said most of the team's abiding memories of the difficult days immediately after the triple disaster are "of the fortitude and resilience of the Tohoku residents".

Many of the team were involved in volunteer work in the weeks after the disaster, with Nick Rees, of business process outsourcing organisation Talent2 Pty Ltd, taking emergency food and water supplies to Minamisoma, and IFG Asia's Tony Collins delivering supplies to Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture.

"As keen weekend cyclists in the first place, we wanted to put our interest to good effect and help others while getting fit", Williams said. "We also wanted the ride to challenge us, and thought that 320km over two-and-a-half days would achieve that.

"We are all over 40 and at least one member of the team is over 50. We're part of that growing breed of middle-aged-men-in-lycra and we all like our pies and pints", he added.

Craig Harrison, director of client services for Crown Worldwide KK, is training intensively ahead of the ride and is trying to get as many hours in the saddle as his busy working schedule permits.

"We all do different jobs with different working hours, and some of us have families. This makes it very hard for us all to meet up every weekend for training rides, so each of us is training at his own pace", Harrison told *BCCJ ACUMEN*.

"It's clear that we are each going to be travelling at a different pace, but this is not a race or a competition. The important thing is that we're doing it to raise money for a really good cause", he explained.

The UK-based online bicycle and apparel shop Wiggle is providing the team's jerseys while Williams hopes that corporate sponsors will put their firm's logos on the cyclists' shirts. InterFM's Guy Perryman plans to interview the cyclists on the radio station and Byron Kidd is promoting the project on his *Tokyo By Bike* blog. In addition, logistics firm DHL will provide support vehicles for the riders.

The ride will be over three days, with Tomoko Maeda, Miss Earth Japan 2011 and the SMP goodwill ambassador, hoping to start the riders from Nihombashi in east Tokyo at 7am on 19 April.

The team plans to complete 150km on the first day to break the back of the

journey and spend the night beyond the coastal town of Hitachi. Day two will cover about 100km, when there may be additional detours because of the exclusion zone around the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. The final day will be the least challenging, with a gentle 70km ride into Minamisoma.

Asked what the toughest part of the ride will be, both Williams and Harrison were in agreement: getting out of bed on day two.

"We hope that our ride becomes an annual event on the British expat calendar and, next year, we hope to encourage more participants", Williams said. "If we can donate more than ¥1mn to the Save Minamisoma Project every year, we would feel that we are making a real difference to the residents' lives.

"Of course, we hope that soon there will be no need to buy food and water for the people of Minamisoma, in which case we shall find another good cause for which to ride". 🇬🇧

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www.saveminamisoma.org/



Nick Rees



Craig Harrison



Richard Williams



Jon Hindley



John Stanton