

Featured Felines: Cats' Adventures & Travels 4

(page checked April 2026)

**Rastus (and Max) of New Zealand
Motor Cat (and Catman) of Washington DC**

Biker cats? Yes, really . . . (2010)

You might have come across accounts of dogs on motorbikes — but biking cats? Indeed they have existed: we know details of one in New Zealand and one in America, although sadly neither is alive today. They were true 'free spirits'.

Rastus

**of New
Zealand,
via Canada
and the US**

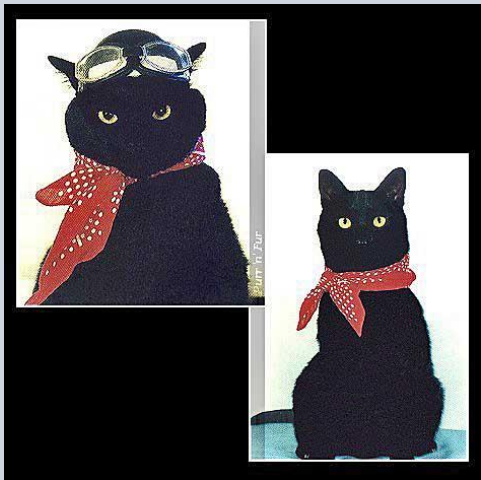


Rastus finds a soulmate

Rastus was a jet-black, Bombay-cross cat (although one source described him as Burmese), born in Canada. Max Corkill, a panel-beater by trade and a keen car and bike restorer and bike customiser, had worked in the Vancouver, BC area of Canada for many years; he and Rastus met each other in 1989 at a swap meet. A young girl asked him to look after the kitten while she went to look at something, but she never returned. Corkill took him home, advertised in the local paper and on radio stations, but when there were no replies he decided to keep the cat. The two were soon to become inseparable. On finding Rastus one day a few weeks later asleep on one of the bikes in his workshop, Max started it up to see whether the cat would take fright and jump off — but he didn't. So Max took the bike, with cat, out for a slow ride around, and Rastus loved it, leaning forward with his forepaws on the handlebars and back paws on the petrol tank.

The biking begins

From then on, whenever Max rode, so did Rastus. A leather cover was made to fit over the tank of whichever bike they were using — Rastus wasn't fussy — for comfort and to give a better grip, and before long he also had a specially made little helmet and pair of goggles. He sported a red-spotted bandana round his neck in authentic biker fashion (*below, left*). In North America alone he was said to have covered some 75,000 miles in all (120,000 km) cruising around with Max. For longer journeys, instead of his customary position leaning into the wind on the petrol tank, Rastus would ride in a specially made zipped pouch mounted on the tank in front of Max, with just his head peeping out. The BMW's tank sometimes became very hot, but with Rastus' comfort always a priority Max's design incorporated venting which allowed air to flow over the tank in the space beneath the bag.



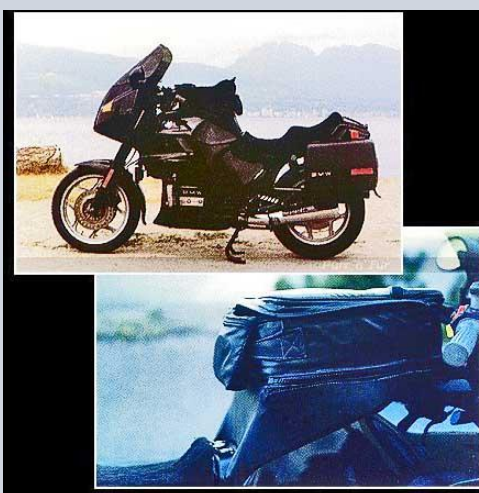
A change of scene — and charity work

In 1994, after his long stay in Canada, Corkill returned to New Plymouth in his native New Zealand to be near his elderly mother. Of course Rastus went too, although first he had to spend six months in quarantine in Hawaii, which he didn't enjoy and Max said seemed 'very long'. Once he was cleared, the pair devoted time to raising money for animal charities. Max formed a company to market souvenirs such as T-shirts, posters and badges (the latter sold out). They even had a joint cheque account, with Rastus' signature being his paw-print, also used on some of the merchandise.



The duo visited schools to tell children about the importance of caring for pets; they attended various functions; they starred in a prize-winning television advert for the Bell Tea Company. 'The cat was just like a person,' said Bell CEO John Mahoney. 'He used to come into the offices here and make himself at home. He would drink milky tea out of a cup (no sugar), and would get quite testy if it was taken away before he had finished.' There was a thriving Rastus fan club, and the pair became a familiar sight on the roads around Taranaki and New Plymouth, often on Max's classic 1952 Sunbeam (*above*).

At Christmastime each year Max would put on a Santa outfit and disguise a bike as a sleigh, while Rastus sported a special helmet with little imitation reindeer antlers attached (*next page below*). They would take part in a Toy Run, organised by a local bikers' group who collected toys along the way for disadvantaged children. In some ways the cat was said to behave more like a dog, obeying Max's commands and 'growling' replies, rather than meowing.





Tragedy and tributes

Tragedy struck on the morning of 20 January 1998, when they were riding Max's customised black BMW, in company with his partner Gaynor Martin. Their bike collided head on with a car coming round a bend on the wrong side of the road; all three died instantly. Rastus had been in his pouch on the tank. The 31-year-old car driver turned out to be drunk, and was charged by police with two counts of manslaughter as well as driving offences.

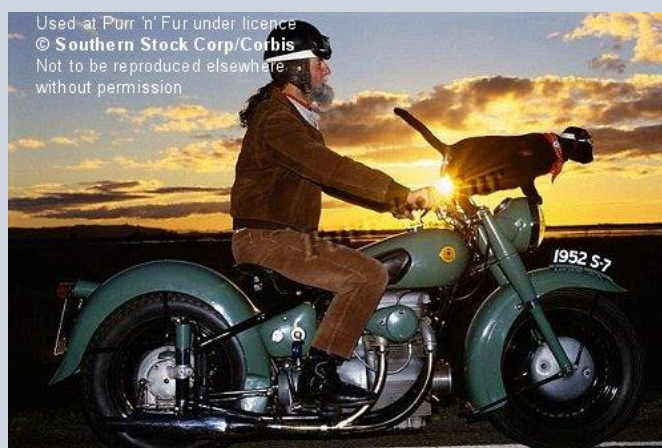
Their friend Pastor Wally Aish took the funeral service for Max and Rastus on 23 January in New Plymouth. An amazing crowd of over a thousand fellow bikers came to pay their respects and take part in the funeral procession (*below left*). The two pals' helmets were placed side by side on the coffin they shared (*below right*), and they were cremated together, as Max had wished. Their ashes were scattered by Max's eldest son at a ceremony on Mount Egmont, a mountain they both loved and that Rastus had been the only cat to climb. There's a [tribute site](#) (*archived copy*) for Max, Gaynor and Rastus; and at the scene of the accident three white crosses were erected at the roadside, the centre and smallest one for Rastus having a black wooden cat attached to it, with a red bandana.





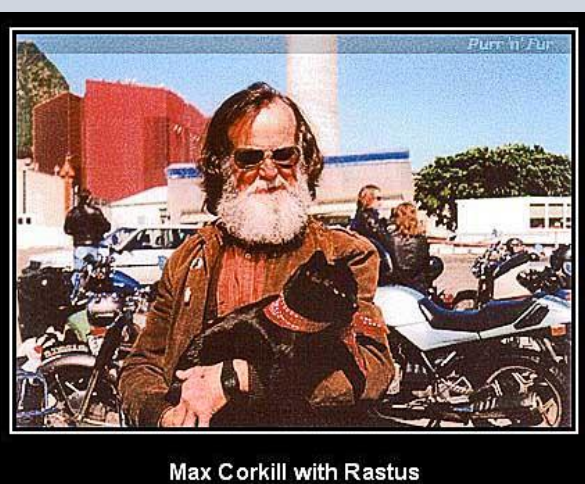
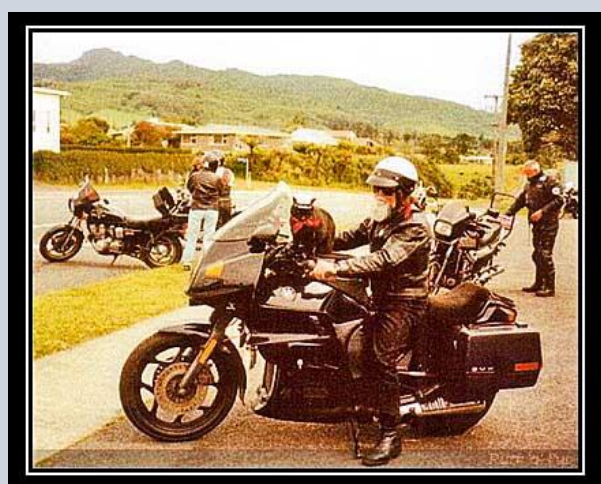
Rastus in print

A [series of books about Rastus](#) ([archived copy](#)) was written for children by New Zealand author Carolyn Ann Aish, as well as a summary book about the lives of the motorcycling duo and information about Max's bikes. In 2012 another book was published, *Max and his Marvellous Motorcycling Moggy* by Elizabeth Krammer, published by [RSVP Publishing](#) (now *Eunoia Publishing Group*) of New Zealand, ISBN 978-0-9876587-3-9. Although only a small softback volume it's packed full of information about Max and Rastus and the busy lives they led, and has a number of photographs I hadn't seen before. Highly recommended — and a donation of a dollar is made to the NZSPCA for every copy sold.

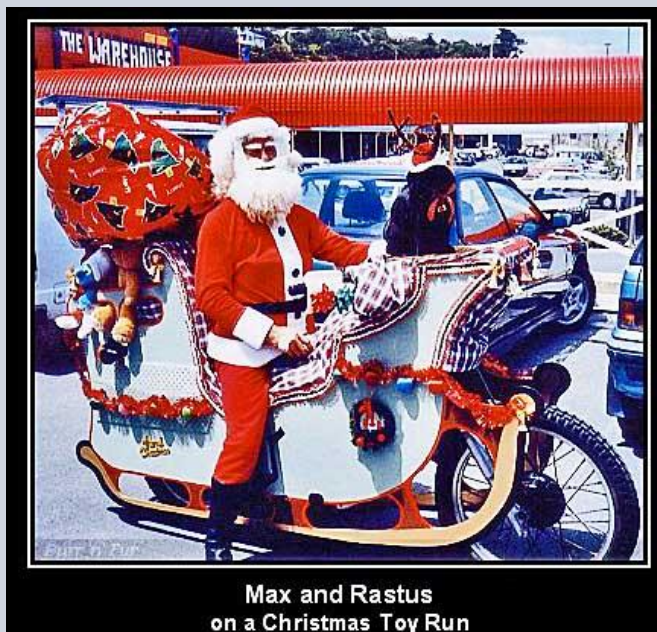


With acknowledgements to Max and Rastus: *The Road they Travelled*, by Max's nephew Logan Sutton, self-published by him in 1998; ISBN 0-473-05544-9. Warm thanks also to Elizabeth Krammer for permission to use images from her book.

A 2010 image by [travelling-light at Flickr](#) shows Max and Rastus, surrounded by children, during what may have been one of their school visits.



Max Corkill with Rastus



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Motor Cat of Washington DC, USA

This tabby-and-white female, born in 1984, came originally from a garage in the Washington area. She was covered in dirt and grease — hence her earlier name of Greasy — and didn't seem to be particularly well-cared for. When J. Catman (not his real name, but the one he preferred to use) took

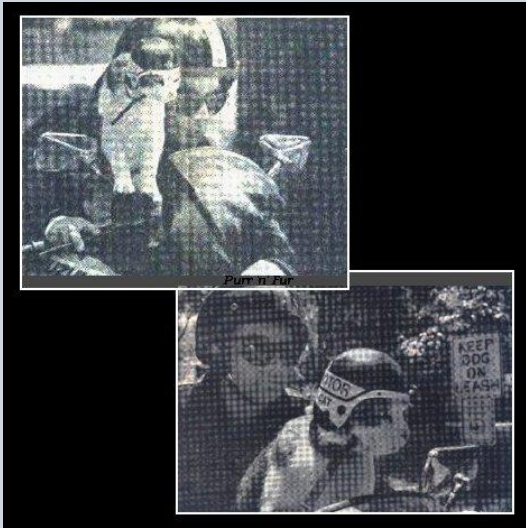
his car in for repairs the mechanic apparently did a poor job on the car, but agreed to give up Greasy. She rode home in the car's back seat, sitting up just like a person would.

An unusual cat

At her new home, Greasy would perch on a windowsill and watch traffic; if a loud motorcycle went by she would stare at it, rather than running away from the noise as many cats would. When Catman watched racing on TV or videos, she'd be very interested, would sit up on her chair and watch the TV, he recalls. And she liked loud music, especially Jimi Hendrix! Another example of her bizarre behaviour occurred one day when Catman was driving his car and was pursued by another car driven by a woman, who speeded up when he did and seemed to be trying to attract his attention. When he eventually pulled over, she said there was something on the car roof. It was Greasy! She was standing on it and had evidently 'surfed' up there since he'd left home — and he hadn't been going particularly slowly. She liked being on car roofs, but after that episode he always checked carefully every time before driving off.



'Greasy' becomes a biker



But Catman had been a biker for a number of years, and he kept finding the cat perched on his bike saddle. One day he decided to take her for a short ride, very slowly, thinking she would be scared and jump off and that would be the end of it. But she seemed to enjoy it: and that's how, in 1988, she started to ride with him and became **Motor Cat**. Catman insisted it was her idea; no one made her do it and at first he tried to dissuade her — but she was quite clear that she wanted to ride, and she loved it! After a year or so she was quite a pro. He fixed pieces of carpeting to the petrol tank and back seat of his Yamaha 500, to make her more comfortable and to give better grip for her claws — and so the pair of bikers caused people to do double-takes as they cruised the highways. To begin with he never

exceeded 35 miles an hour (56 km/hr), but Motor Cat loved to speed, liked the wind on her face and would try to get him to go faster. Her usual perch was on the petrol tank so she could look through the windshield, but sometimes she rode pillion, or even occasionally on his shoulder. Catman trained her to lean into the curves by nudging her, but later she got the hang of the turn indicators and would know when a turn was coming up. She also knew how to brace herself for stops. Neither she nor Catman ever came off the bike.

Once it became obvious Motor Cat would be riding regularly, her owner started to look for a helmet for her — but it took a long time, as no one made helmets for cats! Eventually a West Coast company was located that would make her a mini-helmet; it was colour-coded to match the bike, and had her name emblazoned on it. It reduced the wind and traffic noise for her, although her ears had to be pressed down under it. She didn't seem to mind.

Worrying time

In 1993 Catman and his biking partner were separated for three weeks, following a heated altercation at a local Seventh Day Adventist church. He wished to deliver an urgent message to someone at a ceremony being held there, and was carrying Motor Cat with him. The ushers refused to allow them in and asked them to leave. Catman said his pal had just as much right to be there as anyone else, and a minor scuffle ensued, during which the cat ran off. He couldn't find her. In the end he gave up his landscape-maintenance job in order to maintain an almost round-the-clock search, distributing thousands of leaflets to all homes within a half mile of the church. There was still no sign of her. Finally one day, exhausted, he was sitting down having a snack not far from the church when she suddenly appeared, meowing loudly and demanding to be picked up. She was thinner, but otherwise seemed none the worse. Thinking she probably wouldn't want to ride the bike, he was planning to order a taxi — but Motor Cat just wanted to get on and ride home!

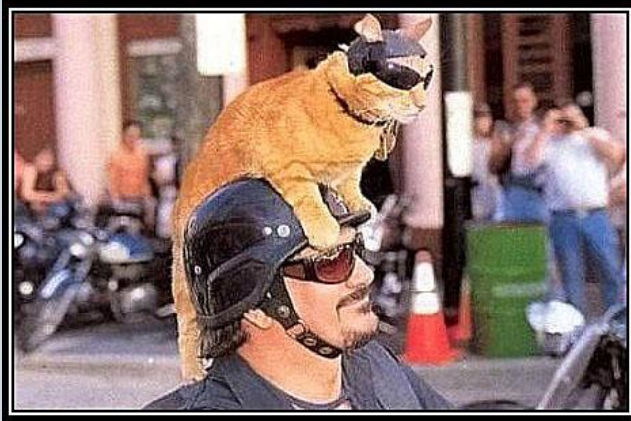
End of the road

By 1998 Motor Cat had developed diabetes, but treatment kept it under control and she was still riding regularly. In 2001, though, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. One day in July 2002 they'd been visiting a recreation park and she seemed in really good spirits; but after that her condition started to rapidly deteriorate. Catman had to make 'the extremely hard decision' to have her put to sleep. She was surrounded by friends at the Takoma Park Animal Clinic, where she'd been a patient for 14 years — but never for any bike-related incidents. She was 17 years old.

Donations were accepted for a permanent memorial in the pets section of Parktown Cemetery in Rockville, Maryland, with any surplus funds going to the American Society for the Protection of Animals (ASPCA). (*acknowledgements to the Washington Post and National Geographic*)

More biker cats (2010)

Since writing about Rastus and Motor Cat, a couple of other feline bikers came to light, though there are no details of 'when or where'. There is this image of one cat with a rather different mode of travel (*left*); and then there's a short video of another (*right*) at YouTube called [The Biker](#) (2011), one of an excellent collection of videos grouped under the title of *It's OK to be a Cat Guy*, all available [here](#).



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Featuring Felines: Cats' Adventures & Travels 5 (2010+) (page checked April 2026)

Kitty

the backpacking cat



In late September 2008 Laetitia and Guillaume (William), a young couple originally from Bordeaux in France, set out from Miami in Florida on an expedition to walk some 9000 miles (over 14,000 km) through 13 countries to Ushuaia in Tierra del Fuego, Argentina, the most southerly city in the world. They planned to take 3 years on the journey, travelling entirely on foot and living on just 1 euro a day each (about 85 pence or \$US 1.35 at late-2010 rates), believing that 'Money did not buy happiness.' They would be meeting all kinds and classes of people, and would share their adventures and experiences with the world by photos, videos and a blog. A film was in mind when the trip had been accomplished.

A feline companion joins the trek

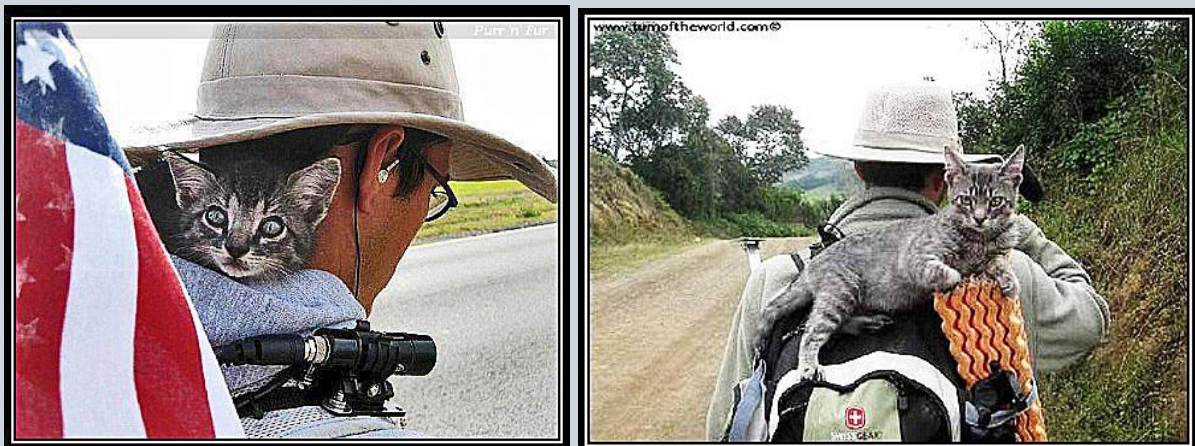
Just a month into the journey, while walking on a busy road near Baton Rouge, Louisiana, they came across a female tabby kitten, not more than a couple of months old, apparently abandoned by the roadside. Taking her up for her own protection, they thought to find a family to look after her and leave her with — but within 24 hours she had captured their hearts and become part of the expedition. The kitten, named **Kitty** by Laetitia, seemed to bond well with the couple, and despite some initial difficulties and misgivings, she became an integral part of their lives. For much of the time she rode on Guillaume's backpack, where a small umbrella was rigged up to protect her from the sun and rain; even so, it was so hot in parts of Mexico that they had to travel only in the evenings and early mornings. Kitty seemed to be enjoying her travels, often moving up onto Guillaume's shoulder for a better look at what was going on, and not at all shy about meeting strangers or seeing unfamiliar places.



People they met were generally amazed — after all, as Guillaume put it, a globe-trotting cat is not found on every street corner. Her presence helped in making people decide to welcome them. Guillaume said that while he expected all kinds of difficulties on his journey — cold, heat, shortage of cash, difficulty with so much walking — he had never expected to have a cat as companion! Clearly she needed some extra financial outlay for food, and veterinary care if needed, as well as fees for paperwork at some frontiers, but presumably these did not come out of the meagre daily allowance.

William and Kitty alone

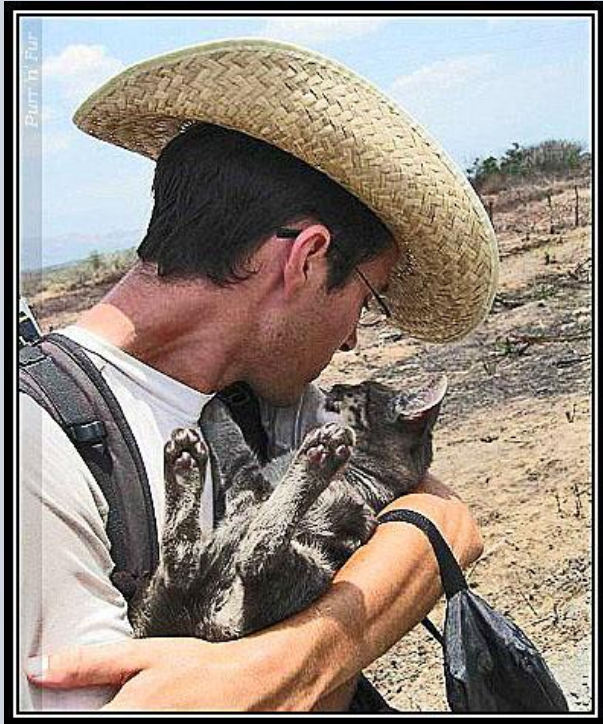
In early September 2009, after less than a year on the road, Laetitia returned to France; I don't know why. The couple had previously decided that if one of them withdrew from the expedition, for whatever reason, Kitty would remain with the other, so she continued with Guillaume. He said she was quite distressed for about a week, meowing a lot and apparently missing Laetitia, but then settled down again and their routine continued much as before. Kitty loved her spot on the backpack — after all, she had effectively grown up there — and it's where she slept through the afternoons. One ritual that had to be observed was a cuddle with Guillaume every morning before they set off: otherwise she meowed until she got one! Guillaume found that she didn't like other animals of any kind.



Later news

Later updates on the journey were hard to find, but it appeared that Guillaume reached

Colombia and made quite a lengthy stop there. He was working on a social programme in a small, poor village, helping elderly people who have no government support and live in unsanitary conditions. He wrote of opening a small business that would enable people to gain a bit of autonomy. In June 2010 a blog said all was well and that he was still in Colombia, in Cali, earning a little money with a view to continuing his journey. A separate report said he was starting up a video production company and had already produced several short films. Kitty had been spayed, so that she would not come on heat and there would be no kittens; and each evening he was taking a walk with her on his shoulder so she didn't lose touch with this means of transport



The last information found was from August 2010, when Guillaume reported from Santander de Quilichao, still in Colombia, that Kitty had been featured on *Animal Planet* on the Discovery TV channel, that a new website was coming — and that he and Kitty would 'soon' be recommencing their trek. Further information was very sporadic, but it seems doubtful that they ever resumed their original journey.



Is Kitty safe?

Concern was expressed in comments made on the internet about the advisability, even the morality, of taking a cat on this kind of journey, with its various risks and hazards. Guillaume

was quite clear that Kitty was free to leave at any time, but she chose to stay with him, and pointed out that she had a far better life than was likely if she had not been picked up from that Louisiana roadside. She had all the necessary vaccinations, was well looked after — in fact, had put on weight since being spayed — and he was sure, after living in close contact with her for two years, that she was happy, and he knew when she was not. The intention was that when the expedition had been completed and they reached Ushaia, she would return with him to France.

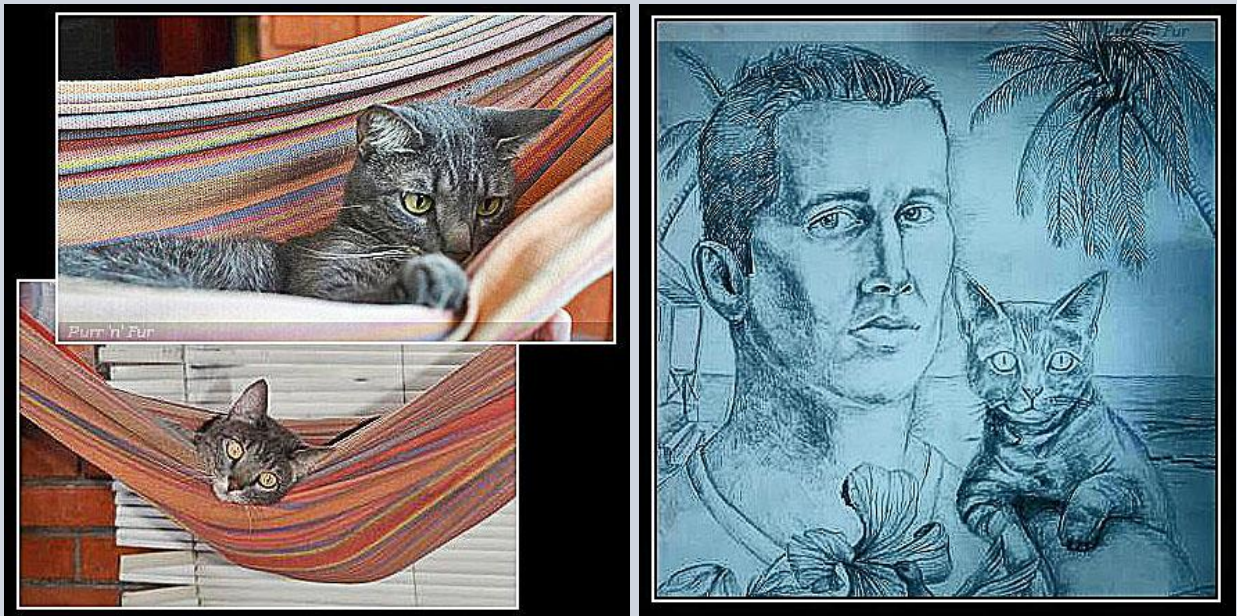
The home site for the journey was [Turn of the World](#) (*archived copy – but seems now, for some reason, to be devoted to visiting Iceland!*) and a [YouTube video](#) shows how photography was achieved while on the move. From Guillaume's [AmericaByFoot](#) channel, more short films featuring Kitty are available, some made by himself and Laetitia, and some by news channels in various countries reporting on the expedition from as far afield as China; a few in the list are unrelated to the trip, but scroll through to pick out the Kitty-related footage. There's also a [Facebook](#) page (*nothing since 2013, then all of a sudden there were posts in May and August 2018 – just images, no explanation, and a couple more in 2020/21, but Kitty was still with William. See next page for further, final update in late 2021.*).

There are a couple of earlier short YouTube clips from Central America, one from [El Salvador](#) and a rather scary one from [Guatemala](#), with traffic passing very close and Kitty apparently not secured.

Update, May 2013

By this time news of Kitty and Guillaume had been scarce for some time, but more recently there were some posts on their Facebook page (*link above*). It seems they still weren't travelling at the time, but whether they intended to in the future wasn't clear. They remained in Santander de Quilichao, in the Colombian department of Cauca. In August 2012 there was a nice sketch of the pair, with an excellent rendition of Kitty (*below right*); a short video clip dating from December 2012 showing Kitty — who has grown into a fine cat — sleeping on a desk and then waking up when Guillaume greets her; and in March-April 2013 a few images were added of Kitty relaxing in a hammock.





This picture from Facebook, September 2018, location unknown

Update, October 2021

The [Facebook](#) page had posts reporting that Kitty, then 13 years old, was sick with liver problems. A fundraising effort seems to have raised \$1000 towards her treatment, but irritatingly, and as so often before, there was no further explanation or news, despite many requests for updates from followers. At the time she was shown as living in Santa Cruz de Lorica in Colombia, where she was being treated at a veterinary clinic.

Nothing further was found about Kitty (April 2024), so she could well have died by then.

[Love Meow](#) (Feb. 2010: many photos)

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