

OH, IF THIS COAT COULD TALK

WAS IT LUST?

It was Fall 1988 after a lengthy stint in Ghana when I returned to Exeter, County Devon in Britain to complete a report and have a reunion with dear friends. On a walk down South Street, I saw the famed oiled and waxed olive-green Barbour Border Thornproof Coat in Pinder & Tuckwell, the famous Gentlemen and Ladies clothier and stopped in for a look.

While several other coats and thorn proof accessories in the Barbour line of outdoor clothes were present for the country folks of Devon, I focused on the Border. Having lusted for this Border Barbour for years this was going to be the prize from Ghanaian work. The size 42 fit well with raglan construction and allowed room for either sport coat or Irish sweater, which the attendant insisted, I try.

THE ROYAL SEAL

After all, with about 100 years tradition this was the finest in outdoor clothing and J. Barbour & Sons Ltd. enjoys the well-deserved appointment to The Royal Household, thus displays the Royal insignia. We had all seen The Queen bedecked in same on country outings, complete with green Wellies, which I also added to the wardrobe, as well as the pile liner for cold climes and the wide brimmed sports hat to complete the outfit.

Imagine dressed in the mid-length Barbour Border Thornproof Coat, the finest coat in the world resplendent with pockets for game and additional secured pockets, but with easy access and plenty of solid zips (including a small 'secret pocket' for your essential papers and keys) and brass press-studs. It is topped off with the fully functional hardwearing distinguished looking corduroy collar. Finally, whilst repair kits are available, the Barbour could always be returned to the factory for repair, should a thorn or bared wire pierce its famous fabric. Clearly the only coat one would really ever need. Keep life SIMPLE!! Hurrah, I had arrived!!

A FRIEND FOR ALL SEASONS

Now in the cold climes and snapping in the pile liner to make ready for the real winter, I reflect on its decade accompanying me over five times 'round the world in all weather. We spent many months together in these frigid territories where minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit were common for weeks on end. The shell and pile liner were full protection, yet maneuverable when driving.

The unique construction of the front of the Border and its wrist add further protection from the world's wild weather irrespective of latitude and elevation. The inside closure has a heavy metal zip, which opens from either top or bottom to give maximum flexibility; and the Barbour is securely sealed with then brass stud snaps. All hard-wear is all weather, corrosion-proofed and virtually indestructible. Additionally, the wrists are protected from flowing air or water by comfortable elastic inside the cotton and, of course, the longer sleeves add further protection.

Most fortunately the deep pockets (for game) inside and patched outside the Border easily holds all the woolen accrements like scarves and gloves, and indeed more. In the 'horizontal' rains of Holland in November and March en route the tropics the Barbour Border was the dry harbor. These travels were comfortable when even the hearty Dutch were racing for cover.

VIEWING MOUNT EVEREST

A most memorable trip was to Nepal in the winter when the Barbour Border was stored in the hotel in the Katmandu valley during crisp dry days when the Irish sweater was sufficient. However, it was on that fateful overnight 'safari' when we went to the guesthouse and pushed the taxi to get it started – that the Borbodor Border preformed magnificently wrapped around my feet in bed. The bed was clammy with a feeling of ice. The Barbour allowed me to get a couple hours of genuine sleep before the predawn wake-up call to walk the mile to see the magnificent sunrise over Mount Everest.

It was then I awarded the Borbour Border its General's Five Stars. What a sight was Everest - and to enjoy it from the warmth of the comforting Barbour Border. Indeed, the whole experience remains indelible in my mind's eye. Absolutely fabulous and unforgettable. And if that were not enough after watching Mount Everest awake we returned to the guesthouse for breakfast and glorious Himalayan tea in the garden overlooking the truly magnificent surrounding mountain ranges.

Then the group of eight went on a long eight-hour walk in the surrounding hills. Initially the Barbour was essential against the heavy air. By 10 o'clock the sun broke through and the Barbour Border seemed it were a steam bath. Then the dilemma was how much to sweat and/or how cold to get, not an easy balance. Perhaps a bit of Ying Yang in Nepal. But soon after I carried the Barbour and the cotton liner dried later in the hotel in Katmandu. Fortunately, the Border's internal cotton liner 'breaths' and is washable so it is not offending to those in close vicinity.

REVITALIZED IN THE TROPICS

Then on to Singapore in the spring of 1991 where we rested and can care for the Barbour Border. The reproofing bred new life and vigor to the Barbour. The can of Barbour Original Thornproofing Dressing was hand carried from Exeter. And my my, the Barbour's color had become a dull 'pea' green and obviously dry. The thorn proofing had deteriorated. Looking closely to the seating part of the Barbour Border wrinkles gave the part of the 'game' away.

Basically, the Barbour had been sat in and not predominately been used to cross many fields in the countryside and farms or for the 'shoot'. The directions on reproofing were read with care in the manual and followed scrupulously. Separately three coats of thorn proofing (the can of oil and wax like material melted in a pot of hot water) were carefully administered by my dear lady by rubbing well into the fabric, and then evened to a 'factory finish' using a hairdryer.

Each time the Border was hung to dry with the aid of bamboo poles in the Singapore sun, imagine, just cooking one side at time thoroughly revived the fabled shell of the Barbour. This was a multi-day project with great attention given daily to either let it cook in the sun a bit more or cool down. Then quietly administer another coat of the thorn proofing. This treatment after about five years of life resuscitated the Barbour Border to its resplendent splendor. The Barbour rested for several months in my dear's comfortable Singapore flat as I was completing work in Indonesia since it would not be needed even to the West Java Puncack Hills.

CONSTANT COMPANION: NORTH & SOUTH

Between '91 and '94 there were several trips between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres and the Border was my constant companion. From Indonesian to USA for part of winters then

on to Europe via Malawi and back a similar route, invariably meeting fierce weather in Holland and United Kingdom, my normal stops. The airlines allow hand carrying the Barbour along with the umbrella and a couple of briefcases and a set of 'wheels' for self-portage of luggage. Oh, those years of all that paraphernalia for the extended assignments. Next time must 'lighten the load' was the constant 'cry'.

Going through tropical customs with the Barbour inevitably raised eyebrows and seemingly a rye smiles from the normally tolerant officials and locals meeting the constant flow of diplomats and consultants. After all they had seen it all before; and we were coming to help, weren't we?

The Border always felt at home in the different locales an international accrument needing no documents or passport. Naturally enough the Border most welcomed to stretch out on the heavy hangers after the arduous and uncomfortable flights. It was like it also suffered from jet lag, but being my real companion was ready to serve at a moment's notice and irrespective of fatigue. Perhaps the analogy, if I may say with the greatest of respect, is that a 'Seeing Eye' dog which may in some regards be comparable to my high regard for my Barbour Border.

EXPLORING 'DOWN UNDER'

These years of travel and different climes not unsurprisingly took its toll on the thornproffing and whilst in New Zealand in the first quarter of 1995 I located a new and lucky find. Due the outdoorsy nature of the Kiwi (as I have heard there is little else to do in those magnificent islands) J. Borbour & Sons Ltd. has a factory in New Zealand that, of course, restores its garments and accessories as needed.

Since it was summertime in the Temperate Zone in USA I planned to be there through the fall sent the Border for first class re-constructive treatment as deemed necessary by the Kiwi Barbour experts. The price was reasonable including a sea journey back to my door, all of some 14,000 miles. Imagine what my 'friend' must have thought, fresh but the wrapped up in plastic and then cardboard for a three months voyage!! What kind of a 'friend' would treat you that way?

Subsequently I planned the assignments, so I would not have to traverse adverse climes and return to home base for the nasty weather. Hence, the Border is well rested, but signs of wear emerge especially on the 'backside' where the oiled-waxed base has been rubbed off to the urgent need for redressing. This I can do this project and myself will soon commence. Unfortunately, we face the sub-zero chilling winds pushed south from Canada, so the reproofing becomes Priority One.

Critically there must be time to naturally dry the Border for a few days after the application and 'blow-drying'. Fortunately, I have retained and will impress into service my even older cloth 'friend', the Invertere (car coat length) bought in 1971 from the factory at Newton Abbot, also in Country Devon. This purchase allowed by a special dispensation by the Managing Director, due to my being a 'shirt-sleeve' (but not raglan) of the owner of one of the few retail outlets for Invertere in America. And that, yet again is another story.

There are, however, several relevant postscripts to the current Barbour Border saga. Let be briefly elaborate.

POSTSCRIPTS

First, I gather, but do not follow the burgeoning worldwide industry of outdoor clothing. Whilst there are terrific products from New Zealand and in other countries in Europe as well as America, Canada and Japan I would believe that many of the 'Johnny-come-lately' manufactures at the very least 'borrowed' heavily from the knowledge base of the original Barbour concept and perfected execution. Hence, my choice for serious and dependable outdoor clothing will only be Barbour and, the key correlate - pay the price for the best and you get it. Full stop!!

Second, in my travels there was one chink in the Border's armor. Unfortunately, it was not equipped to fully brace the wild winds of Wellington, New Zealand. It was only that the ferocious and turbulent 160-kilometer winds from the South Island emanating thousands of miles further south in Antarctica quite literally hurdle buckets of rain from the mid-calf to the ground. For these very foul bouts outside of over trousers of leggings, both difficult but not impossible to enter offices in New Zealand (the Kiwis are, after all a pragmatic lot) the Barbour aficionados would likely recommend the longer trench coat model.

Hence, for convenience and sanity I did loosen up and purchase a fine companion to the Border for gusting winds and water. This is a lighter weight oiled-skinned Kiwi Stockman made by the local Eidix company (since 1921!) with overlaps in the shoulders and a wide brimmed outback hat complete with the essential string for putting under your chin. And essential for the rancher types too.

Third, in looking for the can of thorn proofs dressing Barbour's catalogue and background materials were nearby. The promo material is fascinating to read especially how several people over the decades virtually owe their lives to the protection of their favorite Barbour. Most but not all of these were sea and highland adventures when the weather took a decidedly bitter turn.

Lastly, and absolutely no disrespect intended I did catch my self-eyeing the Barbour's recent of country clothing - and especially daydreaming on a couple of coats that I must admit decidedly 'caught my eye'. But, in conclusion, my unswerving loyalty to the Border quickly dispelled any such notion. After all I have a life long serious relationship with my dear friend, which has quite frankly NEVER let me down. Clearly, now I must get the can of thorn proof dressing in the pot of hot water, the rags and hairdryer ready. The time is now!!

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