

Swiss woman on horseback odyssey arrives in Britain

Trevor Cooper, H&H news writer

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An intrepid Swiss rider has reached England on an epic 7,000km journey that she estimates will take one and a half years.

Jessica Bigler and her eight-year-old French Trotter, Gitan, set off from Palezieux in Switzerland on 7 June and has already reached East Sussex. Her journey will take in Land's End, Holyhead, Dublin, John O'Groats and then back to Dover and through France before arriving home.

Jessica explained the aim of the journey was to fulfil a dream, and to raise money for two Swiss charities, one of which looks after retired horses. So far she has raised over £800.

The plucky 24-year old, who left a life as a policewoman behind, said: "I'm really enjoying it and Gitan is fine. The only problem I've had was trying to get into Britain – foot-and-mouth disease appeared the day I caught the ferry across."

The pair are camping as much as they can — Jessica carries a tent and sleeping bag in a large saddlebag — but they are also gladly accepting hospitality from friends they meet on the way.

Gitan is mainly living off grass and hay. But Jessica said the chestnut gelding hadn't lost any weight after 1,200 km.

"He's enjoying the green grass of England," she added.

She said the best thing so far was galloping along the beach in Calais where she took a week off.

"It was the first time Gitan had ever seen the sea," she said.

If you would like to sponsor Jessica, or help her out with stabling on her journey, you can get in touch through her website at www.suisseirlande.com