

Watch The European's exclusive interview with Stanley Johnson

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, June 4, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The former MEP retraced the Silk Road using a 700-year-old diary — and says the medieval explorer's descriptions were so accurate, they still beat GPS. In conversation with Juliette Foster, our editor-at-large explains how the journey shaped his new book, China's green progress, and why Britain must reconnect with Europe



Stanley Johnson

Marco Polo's travel notes were
'better than Google Maps'



Stanley Johnson retraced the Silk Road using Marco Polo's original 13th-century travel diaries – because they were more useful than Google Maps.

The MEP and father of the ex-Prime Minister followed Polo's 4,000-mile journey from Venice to China for a new book and documentary, *In the Footsteps of Marco Polo*.

He completed most of the route on a motorbike with late Oxford University friends Michael de Larrabeiti, the novelist and travel writer, and Tim Severin, the historian and explorer, in 1961.

The trio made it as far as the Wahkan Corridor, on the Afghanistan-China border, but were unable to cross the High Pamirs on two wheels.

They vowed to return and complete the journey together, but Michael and Tim passed away in 2008 and 2020 respectively.

The book and documentary "picks up where we left off" and follows him and youngest son Max, as they drive the remaining 5,000 kilometres to Beijing's Forbidden City in 2023.

Their 5,000km journey – undertaken this time on four wheels, not two – took them through some of the most beautiful places on Earth, few of which have been seen by Western audiences before now.

More than 300 guests including Mr Johnson's son Boris, the former Prime Minister, and Zheng Zeguang, the Chinese ambassador, attended the private screening at the Curzon cinema in Mayfair.

Now Mr Johnson, our editor-at-large, has revealed their road trip was guided almost entirely by Polo's centuries-old notes.

He said the medieval explorer's descriptions were so precise they helped him identify landscapes, towns and routes that still matched reality after seven centuries.

Even local archaeologists, he said, continued to use Polo's original observations to pinpoint key sites. He described the diaries as astonishingly accurate — and, in many cases, more reliable than modern GPS or mapping apps.

His latest trip also highlighted how enthusiastically modern China has embraced Marco Polo's legacy, with cafés, statues and even state infrastructure projects honouring his route, he added.

Speaking to Juliette Foster, exclusively for [The European](#), Mr Johnson, 84, said: "You had Marco Polo's descriptions and nowadays you've got Waze or whatever. And I think in some ways Marco Polo's descriptions were better.

"We knew exactly where we were going because Polo had described it. Everything we saw matched Polo's accounts. It wasn't fanciful — it was real.

"It was remarkable how much he got right. We found places easily by following his notes. His route was still there after 700 years.

"There was real cross-verification. Experts said they still rely on Polo's accounts today."

Turning to wider global issues, Mr Johnson used the interview to praise China's "astonishing transformation" since he first visited in 1975 on an EU mission. He said the country's progress on green technology and environmental policy had outpaced expectations.

"They've leapt far ahead on renewables," he said. "The progress China has made environmentally is extraordinarily encouraging."

But he warned that the world now stands "on a knife edge" — citing climate change, biodiversity loss and plastic pollution as urgent threats.

He also criticised the UK's post-Brexit disengagement from environmental cooperation with the EU, arguing that renewed collaboration was essential.

"Europe has proved hugely important over the last 40 or 50 years," he said. "Britain needs to start working closely with Europe again."

Asked whether Europe could withstand another Trump presidency, Johnson said yes — but warned it would require stronger commitment from EU nations.

"We absolutely could, and we will. But Trump pointed out, ruthlessly, that Europe wasn't carrying its weight. And he wasn't wrong."

As for whether this would be his final expedition, Johnson was less certain.

"Do you want to go full steam into the buffers, or coast gently towards the end?" he said. "I haven't worked that out yet."

The full interview is available to watch above and on [The European's YouTube channel](#).

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