

Travelling to the heart of the story

Globe-trotting journalist, local radio farming producer, author and Farm Africa charity ambassador – just four of the lives of the extraordinary **Kate Adie**. Interview **James Rudman**



Think of Kate Adie and you might picture her reporting for the BBC from a political hotspot, the latest war zone or natural disaster.

Perhaps your visualise her on the spot as the BBC's reporter at the Iranian Embassy siege in London in 1980, arriving on her weekend shift and 20 minutes later describing SAS soldiers storming the building to rescue hostages.

Maybe it was Kate reporting on the brutally suppressed students' protest in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989, or her reports from the first Gulf War, or the US bombing of Libya in 1986, or the tragic sinking of the Herald of Free Enterprise in 1987.

'War is not as it is in the movies. It is vicious. It is unfair. It is not just violent, it is brutal,' Kate declares.

In 1989 she became the BBC's first chief news correspondent, a position she held for some 15 years.

'I had a fantastic run. I had wonderful stories and loved doing it. It was extremely physically tough; it can be a pretty rough and ready business, particularly if you are covering conflict. But it is great; I had a great time,' she recalls.

'But then I thought it was time to do something else. I have covered some very big stories, and you come to a point where you think 'been there and done that' and, yes, there may be other big stories but I have done my stint. And I thought, 'I want to do something else'.'

She decided to end her frontline reporting in 2003, but, characteristically, retirement was far from her mind.

Her home for the past few years is a long way from the white heat of conflict. It is in a charming west Dorset village

surrounded by the pastoral green of peaceful fields, hills, valleys and woodland, where she loves to go walking. That is when she has time, for Kate, now aged 68, remains extremely busy.

A DIZZYING SCHEDULE

She currently presents the BBC Radio 4 programme 'From Our Own Correspondent', does various commentary work, is involved with other programmes and documentaries and has written five non-fiction books, so far.

This has included her autobiography and also a book about the history of founding children, which she was drawn to write as she was an adopted child herself. Clearly, it has been quite a life, which she recalls with candour and occasional bursts of laughter.

Born in Northumberland, and brought up in Sunderland, she found herself with 'rubbish' A-Levels and an uncertain career. But her headmistress was determined to get someone into university and 'shunted' Kate into one of the less popular courses. She found herself studying and gaining a degree in Scandinavian Studies/Swedish at Newcastle University and loving being a Sixties student.

BROADCASTING CAREER

She decided to get involved with broadcasting, but her BBC trainee scheme application brought a disappointing response.

'They took one look at me and I remember them saying: 'Oh, Miss Adie. Candidate number 314', I think I was. 'Yes, yes, yes. Well of course we tend to favour...well, how shall we put it?' And I said: 'Men at Oxbridge?' and they said yes.'

But a few weeks later, opportunity knocked when she spotted a local newspaper article about the BBC starting a radio station in England's North East region, based in Durham. She applied, got the job, and in 1968 started her broadcasting career.

'It was at the lowest level, as a station assistant in local radio, and I learned the business from there,' she says.

This included doing the request programme, the weather, 'Thought for the Day', and being the farming producer.

'The Radio Durham boss, who came from Manchester, looked around and said: 'I have noticed we have got quite a lot of fields around here and farms, and we ought to have a farming programme', explains Kate.

So she became the farming producer when she admitted to liking animals. She went around her first local show armed with an 'I-Spy Book of Sheep' in her hand.

THE RURAL BEAT

After 18 months at Radio Durham, Kate spent five years at BBC Radio Bristol where she was the station's farming producer, among other duties. She hired a presenter with a farming and countryside background, and headed off one day a week to record programmes.

'I think it was the thing I enjoyed most. We travelled around Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Dorset and Somerset, and I was enchanted by the countryside.'

Although being from an industrial

town, Kate knew the countryside 'up north' because her family had a little car when she was a child and they would visit areas such as Weardale, Teesdale and Swaledale, and also went to the Lake District and Cornwall for holidays.

'But this was the real thing,' she recalls, 'standing, listening, with my little tape recorder, to people talking about sheep, about managing the farm, about prices, about animals themselves. I was

fascinated by it. I loved doing that programme.'

Kate says that she particularly enjoyed getting out and listening to people and seeing places. This meant she wasn't interested in presenting, which initially put her off being on television.

'I got elbowed into a job as a regional television reporter, but I was terrible.'

This, she says, was because she wasn't a journalist but a producer and simply had no idea what to do. But her fortunes changed when she got fired from BBC South, and ended up being recruited by BBC's National News.

'They were a bit short of people. No great claims to actually being discovered, as it were,' she says.

'I was in this very tough, every second matters world of both national and international reporting. It took me some time to find my feet, but when I felt that I was getting a grip on it, I realised at the same time I loved doing it.'

'It was a fabulous job that took you to all sorts of places. One day you were doing traffic chaos on the motorway; the next day



UNFLAPPABLE: Kate has covered some of the top stories from around the world

PICTURES: ADAM FRADELEY, MIRRORPIX, REX FEATURES



Countryside interview

you were inside Downing Street; then you got on a plane to fly to Northern Ireland to cover riots. It was the most fantastic job, and that is why I stayed with it.'

Kate decided to end her time as BBC's chief news correspondent 11 years ago. This came as television news reporting was 'changing out of all recognition' to a more presentational and streamed style with the arrival of 24-hour news channels and social media, she says.

THE NEWS REVOLUTION

'There is much less time spent on finding information and background, and making what we call the 'package' with your own cameraman. It is much more someone standing in front of a live (satellite) dish and saying hello to a newsreader.

'And if you are with the dish you can't be where the story is, particularly if it is violent, or difficult, or on the move.'

Kate has continued to travel to the story as part of her links with charity Farm Africa.

'If you spend a long time going to natural disasters, which does happen to a lot of reporters, you become quite involved in the whole business,' says Kate.

This includes asking how disasters like famines happen and what ought to be done.

'Scattering loaves might seem the right thing at the time in an emergency, but I think that nearly all the aid agencies now know that you have to look at the long term,' she says.

FARM AFRICA WORKS

Her first link with Farm Africa's long-term development work, which offers advice and training on sustainable agricultural practices to East African communities, came when visiting its dairy goat project in Kenya in 2005 for the Telegraph charity appeal.

The project provides women with crossbred goats that are resilient and provide more milk than the local native breeds.

The goats are a source of nutrition for families, give them an income and can lead to a communal dairy industry. Local people are trained in animal husbandry, and their knowledge is passed on to other people.

'It is phenomenally good news. It rescues entire families from hunger and poverty,' says Kate, who became a Farm Africa ambassador in 2010.

In 2012, she returned to Africa to visit the Bale Eco-Region Sustainable Management project in southeastern Ethiopia. This trains



local people to make a sustainable living from forest areas without cutting down trees to clear land for farming or making charcoal. This includes activities such as beekeeping and processing wild coffee, and is directly benefiting some 21,000 households.

KNOWLEDGE IS KEY

Kate feels very strongly that local people should not be told what they should do.

'You go in and say: 'We have some knowledge here and some advice. Would you like it?' And then you can watch them through the early period and it takes wings and flies. I think it is hugely important if the West can do something like that.'

She adds: 'I think that is the sort of aid that works.'

Her busy schedule means that Kate is not sure when she might visit other Farm Africa projects. 'I never plan anything. I have a really heavy schedule for another year. I am involved in a lot of things, including World War One stuff. So I never plan the future, but you never know what comes up.'

Her fifth book 'Fighting on the Home Front: the legacy of women in World War One' has been published in paperback, and she has completed a BBC documentary on the subject, which aired in August.

'Everyone else tends, on the whole, to write about battles, strategy and weaponry. I have seen war and conflict, so it has always occurred to me that everybody is touched by it. It is not just those actively involved in the fighting,' explains Kate.

'World War One proved what women could do.' ✂

As a long-term supporter of Farm Africa's work to transform the lives of rural farmers in eastern Africa, I urge the readership of Countryside to get behind this fantastic charity partnership. I've seen first-hand how the charity's practical approach to giving farmers the skills and tools to provide for their families really makes a difference. This is a wonderful opportunity for UK farming communities to pull together and do their bit for farming families in eastern Africa. Please get involved in Give Hunger the Boot this autumn and help Farm Africa's efforts to end hunger for good.

Kate Adie, Farm Africa's ambassador

NFU Countryside and Farm Africa – working together

This autumn, NFU Countryside is supporting Farm Africa's 'Give Hunger the Boot' campaign, which combines enjoyable group fundraising activities with an opportunity to

reflect on and understand the many challenges facing African farming families. The appeal is a chance for schools, churches and communities to come together to take part in fun welly-themed activities and fundraise to help Give Hunger the Boot.

By supporting Give Hunger the Boot, communities can come together to make a real difference to the lives of African families.

How can you get involved?

All you have to do is organise a welly boot-themed fundraising activity, for example a sponsored welly walk with your friends, in your school, church or workplace or a welly-themed cake sale.

For lots of ideas and inspiration about what else you can do to help African farmers Give Hunger the Boot, please visit:

www.farmafrica.org.uk/ghtb

Who are Farm Africa?

You may be surprised to learn that one in four people in sub-Saharan Africa go hungry every day. Hunger kills more people worldwide than Tuberculosis, Malaria and AIDS combined. Many of these people are farmers whose biggest challenge is the lack of skills or knowledge to make the most of their small plots of land and to be able to provide for their families.

Although Africa struggles with hunger, it possesses 60% of the world's uncultivated crop land and has huge capacity for development. Farm Africa believes that Africa has the power to feed itself and that its smallholder farmers hold the key to lasting rural prosperity. The charity works directly with farmers to help them unleash this potential.

END HUNGER >>> GROW FARMING
FARM AFRICA

