

Tour d'Afrique 2023 Completed

I wrote a piece for the GA newsletter in February when I was in Kenya, 2000 km into my 8,600 km cycle from Cairo to Cape Town. At that point, the expedition was only just getting started, and I rode through a further 6 countries, eventually crossing the finish line in South Africa on 22 April. I have detailed some of the experiences and challenges in this report.

This time last year, I had just finished my A Level exam. I was predicted top grades, and planned to read geography at university. In the end, I was just short of the grades that I needed. I set about earning money as a bagpiper, and, in October, signed up to take part in the Tour d'Afrique 2023. A frantic period of planning and training followed, and, on 14 January, I set off from the Pyramids of Giza to cycle 5,400 miles from Cairo to Cape Town.

The chaos of Cairo preceded long, relatively uneventful days through the Sahara Desert. The traffic picked up as we entered Sudan; notably convoys of coaches that would hold their line as they blasted past us at high speed, leaving us with no option but to dive off the road, and there were cars that would deliberately push us off the road; the Sudanese are not accustomed to and often do not appreciate having cyclists on their main roads.

Beyond the constant begging and bartering of the North African cities, the small desert communities introduced us to the famed African hospitality, and this warmth continued the whole way down the continent. The locals were always intrigued by our journey and would welcome us with open arms, and it is these encounters that I shall treasure for the rest of my life.

Due to the conflict in Ethiopia, we had to fly from Khartoum to Nairobi. After a month in the desert, arriving in Kenya was like entering a paradise. I shall never forget my first African rainfall, at the foot of Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania; the smell as the baked ground reacted to the first water for months; the crackle of the thunder and lightning across the twilight sky, and of course the inevitable flooding of my tent. From Tanzania, we rode through tropical Malawi into Zambia, and along to Victoria Falls. The locals refer to it as 'mosi-oa-tunya' – the smoke that thunders. It is a garish showing of the power of nature, and it is one of the most spectacular sights I have ever seen.

It came as relief when, further on in my journey after a wet passage through Malawi and Zambia, it became exceedingly dry again as we entered Botswana; a country dubbed 'The Elephant Highway' for it boasts the largest elephant population in the world. The roads were straight and the landscape unvaried, but an elephant sighting

would provide a welcome adrenalin boost amidst the intense heat of the Kalahari Desert.

Namibia was eagerly anticipated as the toughest section of the expedition. 60% of the roads in Namibia are unpaved, and they are unpaved by name and nature. In Scotland, when one thinks of an 'unpaved' road, a well-maintained canal path comes to mind, or perhaps one may refer to a cobbled section of road as 'unpaved'. In Namibia, an 'unpaved' road, is one that is covered with a thick layer of sand, making cycling more akin to off pisteskiing. Despite their poor conditions, these roads are main highways, and cars and lorries alike travel along at high speeds, leaving huge sand clouds in their wake. This constant pounding causes the roads to corrugate, which makes for an uncomfortable, and slow ride on a bicycle! This did nothing for the integrity of my stomach; I suffered repeatedly with illness throughout the expedition, and was suffering from a severe bout of vomiting in Namibia. The constant up and down movement sent my stomach into turmoil. Despite this, the ever-changing landscapes and conditions throughout the Namib quickly made it my favourite section of my journey.

South Africa was like a 'best of' collection, with all of the major challenges of the expedition condensed into the final 1000 km; this added to the immense feeling of achievement when we rolled into Cape Town on 22 April.

My older brother, Andrew, has downs syndrome and autism. The Elsie Normington Foundation is constructing the Haven Centre; a place for young people with special and complex needs to attend for respite care. This expedition presented itself as the perfect opportunity to raise vital funds for this charity, while following in the footsteps of my grandfather who, 70 years ago, walked from his home in Scotland to Cape Town and back, a journey that took him five years.

I would be so grateful for any further donations which can be made by following the link below.

<https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/john-prendergast-cyclingafrica>