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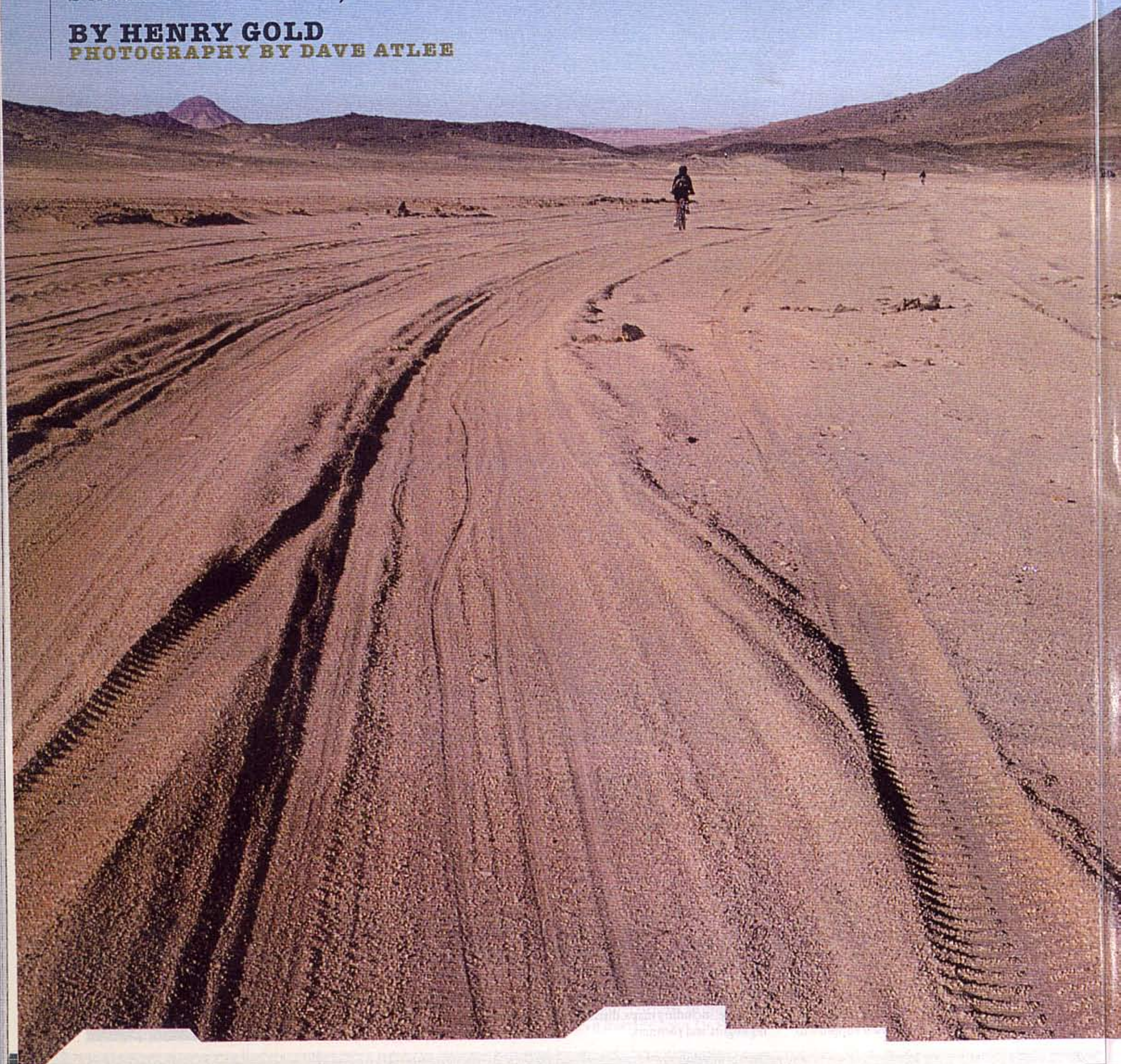
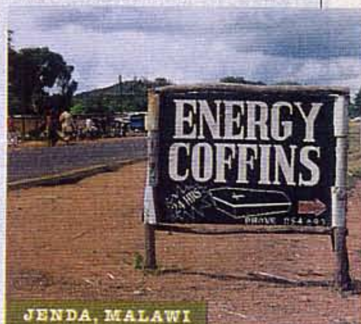
TO THE CANADIAN ORGANIZER OF THE FIRST TOUR D'AFRIQUE, CYCLING 11,000 KILOMETRES FROM CAIRO TO CAPE TOWN SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME. AND AFTER THE LAVA FIELDS, THE BANDIT TERRITORY, THE STONE-THROWING KIDS AND THE TIRE-SWALLOWING SAND, IT SEEMED LIKE AN EVEN BETTER IDEA

BY HENRY GOLD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE ATLEE



NORTHERN ETHIOPIA



JENDA, MALAWI

MARSABIT, KENYA

JANUARY 18

Cairo, Egypt

We're off. Thirty-three cyclists, followed by two supply trucks carrying everything from spare parts to a nurse, roll away from the shadow of the Sphinx on the first leg of an 11,000-kilometre adventure. Foolish or courageous—I'm not sure which—we're planning to ride the length of Africa in 100 days of biking.

It's taken nine months of intricate planning and negotiation to put this motley crew on the road—well, where there is one—to Cape Town. The concept of the Tour d'Afrique, which has been bubbling in the back of my mind for over a decade, came out of my own many years of work and travel on the continent. I knew it well enough to believe that, if we put our faith in providence and in the traditions of the explorers of the past, we could make it.

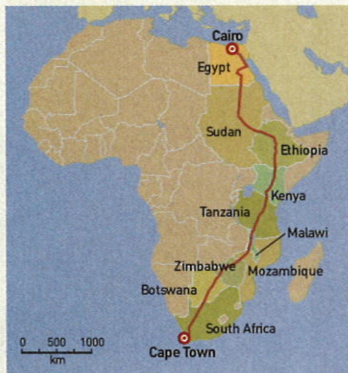
So I assembled an international group of adventurers who ranged from superb athletes to risk-seeking millionaires to a retired Manchester cop to a middle-aged mother of five from PEI who didn't even own a bicycle before she applied to join us. They've each paid $5,000 to $7,000 US to see if they have the stuff to make history. Now, they're finally on the way to finding out.

JANUARY 24

Desert Camp, Egypt

On the sixth day of our journey, we arrive at the Million Stars Hotel, our term for a desert campsite about 40 kilometres east of Qena, the cradle of the Moslem Brotherhood in central Egypt.

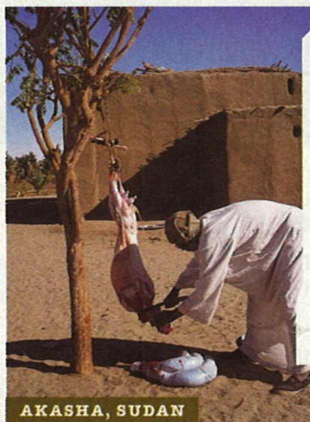
NUBIAN DESERT, SUDAN



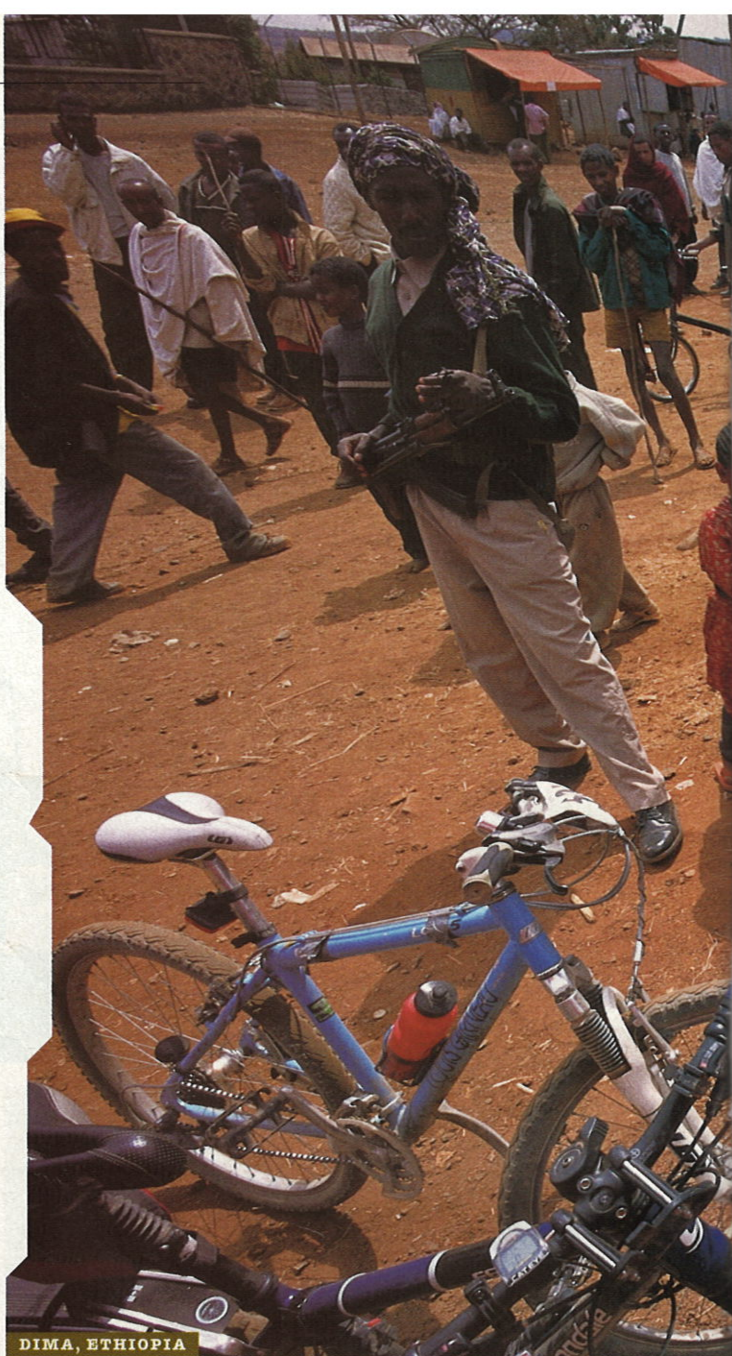
Ibrahim, the army lieutenant in charge of our security, suggests we cluster our tents. His government is worried about attacks on foreigners. In 1996, Islamic extremists linked to the brotherhood killed 17 Greek tourists in Cairo. In 1997, 60 tourists were massacred in Luxor, where we'll be staying tomorrow night.

We've just had our first tough day of riding. Up until now, the landscape has been flat, with a northerly wind helping us along. But just after our daybreak start by the Red Sea, we found ourselves climbing a mountain against a strong wind. To make matters worse, some of our riders have stomach cramps; their bodies are not yet acclimatized to Third-World conditions.

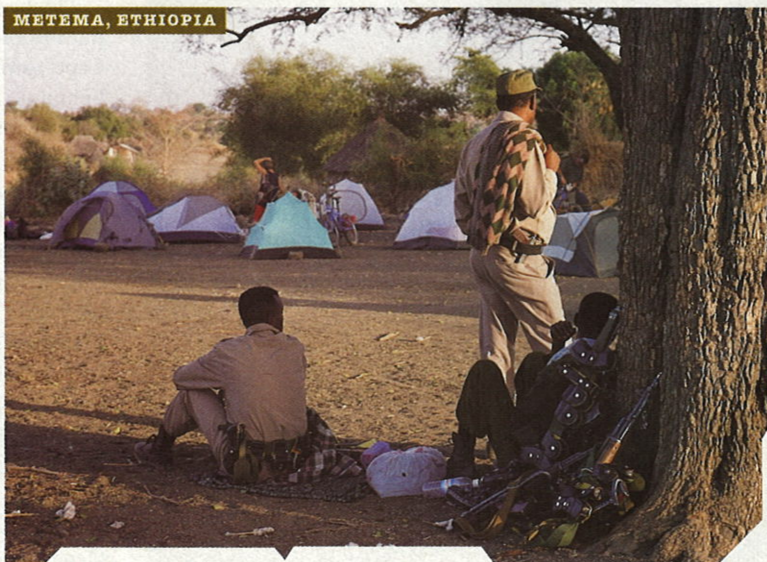
Now, after an excellent meal (for those of us who can keep it down) of *koshery*—noodles, rice, black lentils and onions in a tomato sauce, prepared by our Egyptian liaison, Rezk, who used to be a hotel cook—we head to bed. I settle into my sleeping bag, savouring the crisp air, my own fatigue and the satisfaction of a hard day's ride. Just as I'm drifting off, a shout in Arabic shatters the soft Egyptian night: "Position Number One, *Kulo tamam*." Seconds later, 120 degrees to my left, an ear-bursting: "Position Number Two, *Kulo tamam*." Then, 120 feet to my right: "Position Number Three, *Kulo tamam*." I'm glad that all's well, but do they have to be so emphatic about it? "Oh well," I think, dozing off again, "we'll be well protected tonight." "Position Number One, *Kulo tamam*." Oh *no*. "Position Number Two, *Kulo tamam*." Not *again*. "Position Number Three, *Kulo tamam*." *Quit it, for God's sake*. All through the night, the soldiers ignore our pleas, our threats, our sarcastic parodies. In the morning, those who know how to catnap crawl out of their tents half rested; the others are wrecked. Still, none of us will ever forget the magnificence of the Million Stars Hotel.



AKASHA, SUDAN



DIMA, ETHIOPIA



METEMA, ETHIOPIA

FEBRUARY 7

Dongola, Sudan

It's our day off and the elders of Dongola, the capital of northern Sudan, have prepared a spectacle for us: a camel race, traditional dancing, even a reverse bicycle race (slowest wins) for the kids. We sit in the shade, sipping Coke and ginger ale like visiting pashas.

At night, I'm in my element—hanging out on the street among the milling crowds and eating the cheap, tasty local food. I stuff myself on *ful*, bean

MAP BY STEPHEN HUTCHINGS

stew and beef with bread, finally returning late to the schoolyard where we're camped. Just then, an aristocratic man appears. He's wearing a traditional white robe, the *galabiah*, and head covering. "I am El Hady Elboshra, Governor of the North," he says in English. He joins us for tea and tells us about his life as a general, his rebellion against the government over its radical Islamic policies, his exile in Egypt and his return to what seemed a more moderate regime. He could not have foreseen the atrocities that would befall his people in Darfur a year later. But northern Sudan is so huge—Darfur is about 2,000 mostly desert kilometres southwest of Dongola—that even now the two seem to be in different countries.

We ask the governor about the civil war that has raged for years in southern Sudan and may or may not be finally ending. He explains that the conflict has been fanned by the production of oil, and tells a parable. "Somewhere in the south, on the border with Kenya, there is a tribe that believes God gave cattle to them and only to them. Millennia ago, right at the beginning of time, their ancestors were generous and lent cattle to other tribes, but retained their ownership. The problem is that the other tribes do not recognize this ownership, so the first tribe resolves to take back its cattle by force. This leads to bloodshed. But what can you do? Now, when it comes to oil, there is one tribe that believes the commodity belongs to them."

I keep my own counsel. I've been here before and I know that no matter how bad the political situation gets, the people will retain their undeniable warmth and hospitality. It's the ancient story of humanity: the good and the ghastly warring within the heart of the same country.

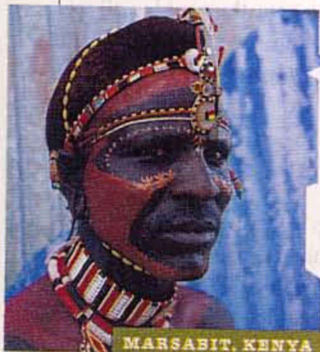
FEBRUARY 10
Desert Camp, Sudan

It promises to be the most gruelling day so far. We've got to cover about 90 kilometres on nothing more than tracks in the sand. There are three ways to go. The first, passing through the villages spread along the west bank of the Nile, means loose sand, 2 to 12

NGORONGORO CRATER, TANZANIA

inches deep. The second, keeping to the outskirts of the villages, offers slightly better tracking. The third, hitching a ride on our support trucks, though the sanest, would be cheating. We choose the second, but soon find that these tracks, when we can actually ride on them, lead away from the Nile, our primary navigational guide. "When you can no longer see the shore or the trees on the banks," I tell our riders, "head back to the river."

I find a hard surface and, with the wind at my back, cruise for a couple of hours, spellbound by the endless expanse and utter silence of the desert. When I come to, I realize that it's been a while since I've seen the Nile shore. I get off the bike and start pushing it due east through ankle-deep sand. Over an hour later, I spot half a dozen other stragglers, and we push on toward the river together. We're all tired and hurting, and the mood is nasty. "Biking through Africa is one thing," whines Michael, an internet millionaire from Scotland, "but this isn't biking. It's unrealistic to expect such a long distance in one day in such conditions." This kind of bitching makes me wonder why some of them signed up. After all, they were warned this wouldn't be a leisurely tour of Tuscany.



MARSABIT, KENYA

That wouldn't get them into the *Guinness Book of Records*. But if they stick to the rules, this trip will. They have a chance to establish a record for the fastest human-powered crossing of the African continent, but Guinness insists they cover every foot of it under their own power (no hopping aboard supply trucks). Most of them are still eligible, and they're determined to keep it that way. But it's late afternoon by now and we still have about 30 kilometres to go. If the road improves, we can make it to camp before sunset; otherwise, the trucks will pick us up—and the chance to be inscribed in history will be over.

As if that weren't tension-making enough, everybody's getting low on water. We're welcome to drink from the big clay jugs set out in the villages we're passing through. The water is meant for locals and strangers alike, but most riders are afraid to drink it. Not me. Surprisingly cool, it seems pure enough, but even if it isn't, better to get cramps that can be treated with antibiotics

than to become dehydrated which, in extreme cases, can be fatal.

We walk on—rest, huddled, under a solitary tree—and walk some more. Gradually, the ground hardens and we bike again. The group strings out; as usual, I'm in the rear.

A few kilometres later, I spot Lorry, a tall blond athlete from Calgary, sitting on the ground, her bike by her side. She's wearing a tight T-shirt and spandex bicycle shorts, not the smartest choice of attire in a country ruled by Sharia Law. Her face is strained. She's just thrown up. She could be suffering from exhaustion, dehydration or even food poisoning. It's hard to tell—but it's easy to tell that she's in a bad way. I suggest we thumb down the first vehicle that comes by. No, she insists, she'll finish the day. I ask a couple of people sauntering by how far it is to El Dabba, the town where we're scheduled to spend the night. Five kilometres is the average guess. Whether she can make it that far depends on what's ailing her. After a while, she decides she's feeling better and gets on the bike. In a few minutes she's back on the ground, retching. Gently, I suggest again that we hitch a ride. "No, even if I have to walk the rest of the way."

When an athlete reaches her limits, it's not uncommon for her to empty what's left in her gut, though it could be a symptom of dehydration. More worrisome yet is her willingness to damage herself for an entry in a book of records. Half an hour later, Lorry gets up; she's determined she'll walk. Eighty feet and she's back

BEREKO, TANZANIA

SOLOLO, KENYA

on all fours, puking again. This time I insist. A minibus comes by and I jump up and ask the driver to take us in.

We arrive in El Dabba and get out in front of a Coke stand where several of our colleagues are replenishing fluids. I offer to pay the driver. He scowls at me, wishes us *Masalama* (peace be with you) and skids off.

Lorry is fine after a couple of days' rest on the truck. But it takes her a lot longer to get over the deep disappointment that she won't bike every inch across Africa.

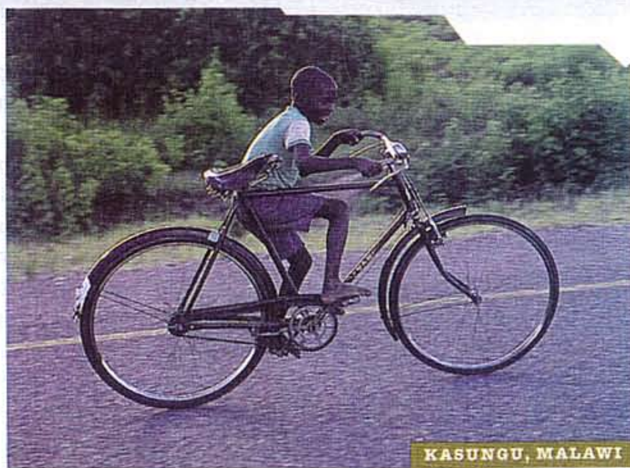
FEBRUARY 25
Debre Tsyon, Ethiopia

Ethiopia is mountains, gorges, hills and valleys, no flat stretches to give us a breather. The roads—packed dirt and stones—give off clouds of dust every time a vehicle passes. Whenever I see a car or truck approaching, I

CHITIMBA, MALAWI

pull a bandana over my nose; it doesn't do much good, but anything is better than sucking dirt. Sometimes, I watch which way the wind is blowing, and cross to ride on the wrong side of the road, thus escaping the dust but putting myself at dumb risk. Fortunately, traffic is light.

Ethiopia is kids—heartbreakingly poor kids in tattered clothes and rubber-tire sandals—who swarm us at every stop. *Give me, give me, give me*—hundreds of times a day. Give me money, give me pen, give me anything. Whether we're biking through a town or stopping to drink *buna*, the superb coffee, or to eat *injera*, fermented pancakes covered with stews, the children are always there—"*Ferenge* (stranger) give me"—and so too are many adults.


KASUNGU, MALAWI

Ethiopia is hunger. Every year, the country has a critical food shortage, usually in the region that's had a poor rainy season. Sometimes this shortage escalates to famine, in which millions die. In 1984, the famine was so severe it shocked the rich Western nations into staging an unprecedented relief effort: planes, helicopters and trucks brought food to a starving nation. But the following year it was just hunger as usual and the usual relief effort. What Ethiopia needs is a kind of Marshall Plan with a continuing investment in time and effort—plus a prolonged period of peace.

Ethiopia, at least this part of it, is stones. Throwing them is part of the culture. Kids throw them at cattle, goats, sheep, dogs, each other—and us. Occasionally, an adult takes it in mind to protect us from pestering kids by winging a stone in their direc-

CAPE PENINSULA, SOUTH AFRICA

tion. None of this is meant to cause injury. The kids, a couple of us decide, just want attention. So when we see them coming, we start talking to them and holding up our hands for high fives. It works. They never throw another stone. Well, almost never.

MARCH 8
Yabelo, Ethiopia

We're in the south now, where the population is sparser and the land more fertile, or rather it's not exhausted from thousands of years of cultivation as it is in the north. As I bike along, a boy is running beside me. He runs effortlessly, his gait as simple and efficient as a thoroughbred. A mile goes by and he isn't even breathing hard. The road suddenly slopes upward but he never breaks stride. Whenever I glance over at him, he smiles. He may be 9 or 10 or even 14 (in Ethiopia, with its scarcity of nutritious food, it's hard to tell). He runs with us for 15 minutes, yet still shows no sign of fatigue.

NEAR CAPE TOWN

In my mind's eye, I see another boy, a white boy sitting in the stands of a large stadium filled to capacity. He has come from his home in the countryside to visit his older brother who's studying at a technical high school in Kosice in eastern Czechoslovakia. It's 1962, and my brother and I are awaiting the appearance of the front runner in the International Peace Marathon, Europe's oldest. As the roaring crowd rises to its toes, he glides into the stadium, completes his final one-and-a-half laps and crosses the finish line, where he does not, as any other mortal would, collapse in exhaustion, but keeps running with the same graceful rhythm around the stadium again. He waves at the spectators, who are overwhelmed, as they should be, for this is Abebe Bikila, the great Ethiopian marathoner who, two years earlier, running barefoot on hot asphalt, won the gold medal at the Olympics in Rome.

I glance again at the young boy running beside me. The odds

Continued on page 72

BIKE, THE BELOVED CONTINENT
Continued from page 60

are long that he'll ever hear the ovations that rang in Bikila's ears. He smiles, waves and is gone.

MARCH 16
Bandit Territory, Kenya

We spend most of the day manoeuvering around crushed lava rocks. Jagged and black, they're what passes for a road here, and they turn bike riding into a jolting, jarring pain in the butt and the wrists. Even those with state-of-the-art bikes find that their suspensions can't absorb the shocks. To make matters even worse, we're in bandit territory, where nomadic marauders prey on truck convoys. Since we're the first cyclists to be allowed to cross this frontier, we're escorted by four armed soldiers in a jeep. Maybe it's their presence, maybe it's the surreal vastness of this place, but I just can't fathom an attack coming, literally, out of nowhere.

I'm more afraid of falling on the rocks, and spend the day's ride looking down, not that there's much to look up at anyway—just broken lava and more broken lava. So I block out the surroundings and the constant pain by turning my thoughts to Africa. I first came here two decades ago to run a health clinic in a refugee camp in eastern Sudan. I was young and uncertain—who knew what awaited me? Now, Africa is within me. Every time I come back, I'm filled with a mystical force that makes me feel I've returned to my origins. This, after all, is where we came down from the trees—my forefathers and yours. And Africa gives me something that few places in the world can offer anymore: space, wilderness, freedom. This is where I'm most alive, where I can still feel the beat of the natural world. And this is where the rural people, for all their poverty, AIDS, coups d'état and civil wars, are still willing to share what little they have. Pity that the wealthy Western nations, blinded by ideology and politics, have never shown them the same generosity.

APRIL 6
Bush Camp, Tanzania

I often wonder how much the personality of a founding leader determines the eventual history of a country. Tanzania's Julius Nyerere had a vision: to develop an African socialism based on economic self-reliance, egalitarianism and rural development. Its cornerstone was *ujamaa*, familyhood. It would collect people into villages or communes, where they'd have better access to education and medical services. Such ideas made him the darling of progressive Western governments, including Canada. During the '60s and '70s, Tanzania got more aid than any other African country. *Ujamaa* failed, but that didn't drive Nyerere to become a dictator. On a continent largely run by tyrants and egomaniacs, he's considered a saint by his people, the first modern African ruler to retire peacefully.

As we bike through the countryside, we see around us the manifestations of Nyerere's legacy. This land has not turned violent and ugly. The people, friendly and curious, greet us with "*Pole, pole*," which means "Take it easy," but can also mean "I'm so sorry you have to do this." The most-asked question is "Where are you going?" But "Cape Town" means nothing to most of them. They simply want a response from someone who's obviously from an alien world. Those who do know it, then ask why. Why indeed. I chuckle at the irony (how could the terribly poor people of Tanzania ever understand the luxury of such a journey?) and pedal on.

Not that the pedalling's good on this day. It's been raining hard off and on for hours, and Jim and I are looking for someplace to get out of it. I like travelling with Jim; he's a tall, muscular food-company owner from Kingston and, perhaps because of his work, a superb food gatherer. His gargantuan appetite may also have something to do with it. No matter where we are, within minutes he discovers the one place that sells freshly cut beef, lamb or chicken ready for the fire—and cold beer.

We stop, soaked, in the first village. I follow Jim into a hut where I'm almost overcome by heavy smoke. "It's not bad down here," I hear him say. When I sit down, I can make out a couple of pounds of potato chips frying in a big wok. Jim's negotiating for meat that has to come from another hut; each has its specialty. We start with hot cups of tea, then eat and dry out in the smoky gloom.

We set out again, but 90 minutes after we're back on the road, we're drenched

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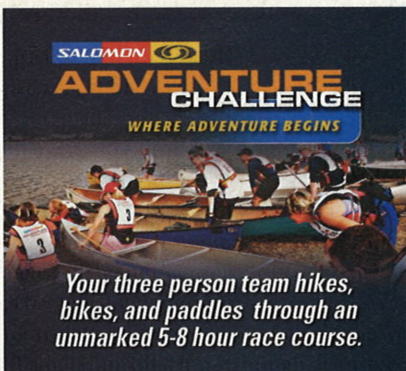

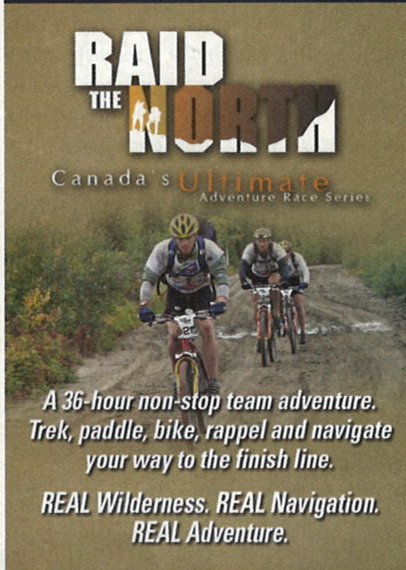

BIKE, THE BELOVED CONTINENT

Continued from page 72

again, and it's still 25 kilometres to our campsite. We spot a bar and decide to warm up. I order a Knockout and Jim a Tyson, local heavyweight brandies. We're about to leave when the region's police chief, who's been following our progress for the last few days, walks in. He's a big man, a dead ringer for Idi Amin (though that's as far as the comparison goes) and he's looking sharp in his spotless pressed khakis. He buys us each a Tyson, sips a Coke and asks after Sergeant Chris, one of our bunch who was on the Manchester police force for 18 years. We drink a little more. Finally, time to go. It's still drizzling out there, and though we could catch a ride in the chief's car, we prefer to bike. The countryside, rolling hills dotted with tea plantations, shimmers in the rain. Our tires swoosh like techno music. We must be quite the picture, two white guys, both over 50, laughing like teenagers as we wobble on muddy bikes down a winding road in Tanzania. Thank God there is no traffic.

APRIL 15
Sanga Bay, Malawi

I was first here 15 years ago when Malawi was ruled by an autocratic old man, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda. He was appointed to be a caretaker leader when Malawi gained its independence from Britain in 1964, but proceeded to run things, to his considerable benefit, for the next 30 years—until he was well into his nineties. I was in Malawi to make a documentary about Canadian-sponsored development, trying to find scenes that would make the taxpayers back home feel proud. But the pickings were slim. Driving through the countryside one day, I spotted a young woman grinding corn in front of a small homestead. She was about 18 and shy in the most attractive way. We set up our camera and interviewed her. I asked the standard questions, including, "What was the happiest day of your life?"

"Last Christmas. We had a whole chicken for dinner."

This time, we've pitched our tents on a football field in a village on the shore of Lake Malawi. To get out of the heavy rain, some of my colleagues go to the local bar. Once he learns they're Canadians, the owner refuses to accept their money. Thanks to Canadians, he tells them, this part of Malawi has clean water, wells, toilets, jobs. "Everything good here was because of a group called CPAR," he says. This fills me with emotions: pride, because I started CPAR (Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief) 20 years ago with Dr. Mark Doidge of Toronto and brought the organization to Malawi; and despair, because of all I hoped to achieve then and did not.

We awake drenched. Our tents, showing the wear and tear of three months of tough use, couldn't keep the all-night rain off. No matter. We're a steamroller now. By 6 a.m. we're up and packing. But hold on, one of our bikes is missing. Though we hired three guards, one way of contributing to the local economy, somebody has pinched it. Our group doesn't take kindly to this. We've pedalled more than 7,000 kilometres by now without any such incident. "Let's burn one of their huts and see if the bike doesn't appear," one hothead says.

I summon one of the guards and ask him to call the village chief. I explain the situation to the chief, mention my connection to CPAR and offer a hefty reward (1,500 *kvachas*, about $150 Canadian). I tell him I have no wish to go to the police, but if the bicycle doesn't turn up in half an hour, I'll have no choice. "You know your police force," I remind him.

"Give me 20 minutes," he says. Fifteen or so minutes later, as I load my tent onto the truck, I spot the bike. A group of villagers is carrying it horizontally, its wheels still locked by a chain.

APRIL 26
Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Our group is uptight, especially the Brits. Everyone has heard the stories about Prime Minister Robert Mugabe's tyrannical rule and his terror campaigns against the white farmers. The anxiety is understandable but misplaced. As I tell every rider, "You're more likely to die in a car accident than by the hands of some guerilla band."

Today, I hate my words. A speeding car slams into three of our riders from behind. When I reach them, I find Allan spread-eagled on the shattered windshield, blood trickling from his mouth. "He'll never walk again," I tell myself. One of the other two is badly bruised and in shock; the third is okay. (They were riding in single file with Allan in the rear.) By late afternoon our nurse returns from the hospital and announces that Allan, thank God, has no broken bones and will only be kept overnight for observation. After a

BIKE, THE BELOVED CONTINENT
Continued from page 74

couple of days on the truck, our bruised buddies are back on the road.

If you want to get close to the people, there's no better way to travel than on a bicycle. The act of using your own muscles to propel yourself seems to break down the barrier between cultures. Unlike the tourists cocooned in cars and buses, you can be approached, talked to, even laughed at, and you can reciprocate that human connection. But don't try to tell the motorists that. Many despise us, at times even trying to run us off the road. As a character in an Iris Murdoch novel says, "As other forms of transportation grow nightmarish daily, the bicycle alone remains pure at heart." But that purity, as we found out again today, can come at a terrible price.

MAY 2
Mosomane, Botswana

Sandra is the spirit of the tour—though, by all that's plausible, she should never have been on it. She's a 55-year-old mother of five from Prince Edward Island who didn't even own a bicycle before she applied to join us. In her first e-mail, she confessed she was 50 pounds overweight and had never taken a bike tour in her life. Nevertheless, she was certain she could—and *would*—do it.

"This tour is meant for experienced cyclists in top condition," I responded, trying to let her down as gently as I could.

"I have just bought myself a bike and started training," she said in her next e-mail.

"This is one tough trip," I replied. "It's never been done before."

"I've just done my first 25 kilometres. I know it's PEI, but I'm getting in shape."

"There'll be nobody to pick you up when you get stomach cramps or a flat tire in the desert."

These electronic exchanges went on for a while, but in the end her sheer confidence and determination trumped my good sense.

On our first day out, barely 25 kilometres from Cairo, I passed Sandy and had serious second thoughts. She was red-faced and puffing, not looking good at all. "My God," I thought, "how long will she last?"

But somehow she always managed to make it through the day and arrived at our campsite before nightfall. One blazing day in the Sudanese desert I noticed a short, plump figure walking in the distance. I'd found a hard patch—desert biking consists of patches of dirt (you ride) and patches of sand (you walk)—and I was cruising along with the wind at my back. Soon she was about 150 feet parallel to me, looking for her own navigable patch. Besides the two of us, there wasn't a living soul to be seen in any direction. I considered stopping and going on with Sandy, but the wind was too good to give up.

"Everything okay, Sandy?" I asked as I passed her.

"Yup, no problem."

Not long after, I turned around to look for her, but by then she was out of sight. I rode awhile, then decided to rest and wait for her. She's my responsibility, after all. Time passed, no Sandy. I moved on.

Yet by the time I reached camp, she was there. As she always is, sometimes with the help of a lift from a passing car, but mostly under her own surprising power. And no matter whether she's negotiating for an old wooden cattle bell that the herder has to take off a cow's neck or debating with politicians, she always takes manifest delight in the moment.

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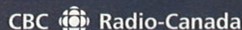

Present the 11th annual

BIKE, THE BELOVED CONTINENT

Continued from page 76

Now, in Botswana, on the last leg of our trip, I decide it's time to apologize to Sandy for my misgivings. I'm only about 500 feet behind her but it takes me half an hour—and all I've got—to catch her.

Botswana surprises us. Here's an African country that works: modern roads, efficient banks, shopping centres, even—alas—a McDonald's. Signs say: "Keep Botswana Clean and Beautiful." And Botswana is clean in another way: a functioning democracy with the highest per capita income in Africa, it's pretty well free of corruption.

I tell the tourist official who's accompanying us how impressed I am with her country, how far it's come since I was last here, when apartheid still ruled neighbouring South Africa. She thanks me, but she worries.

"Let's hope that it will continue and not fall apart like Zimbabwe," she says.

"You've built a good foundation," I assure her.

"In politics," she replies thoughtfully, "you never know."

MAY 14

Fraserburg, South Africa

Fraserburg is a little town, in the northern part of the country, far from the crowded cities. As is so often the case, the more distant the civilization, the nicer the people. No one in town has any idea we're coming—let alone planning to stay the night. Yet in no time, the local ladies organize and bake us chocolate desserts. We stuff our faces but leave lots for breakfast.

Back on the road, we miss the mountains. Northern South Africa is flat and dull. Six-foot wire fences draped with ominous no-trespassing signs run along both sides of the road. It's disheartening, miles and miles of shrubs, with hardly an animal, a human or a building to be seen, all fenced.

Nevertheless, I can't keep a smile off my face. Barring a disaster, all but two of us are about to complete a journey that only a few months ago seemed a cockamamie dream. Ever since I was a boy, I've wanted to do something remarkable, to break a record, win a gold medal. And now, in my fifties, I'm savouring one of those rare moments of pure joy, total peace and a soaring sensitivity to being alive. We've taken on the Everest of biking and we can see the top.

MAY 27

Cape Town, South Africa

It's done. The champagne bottles have been popped and drained and the riders have dispersed. Nine of them managed to complete the distance under their own power and have qualified for the *Guinness Book of Records*. But all 31 of these determined individuals have collected a prize beyond value: the secret of how to transcend their limits. How much they embrace that knowledge—and how much they go on to live by it—will, of course, be up to them.

I'm in a taxi to Cape Town airport.

"Did you enjoy biking in South Africa?" the driver asks.

"Actually, we just biked from Cairo to Cape Town."

"Wow...they talked about you on the radio. Any problems along the way?"

"No, not really...Well, one."

"What was that?"

"Cars. On three occasions, riders were hit."

A minute later, he asks, "Do you know the one person responsible for the most death in the history of mankind?"

A strange question to put to me, the child of Holocaust parents who has lived under Communism.

"Hitler? Stalin? Mao?"

"No," he says with satisfaction. "Henry Ford."

MAY 28

Heathrow Airport, London

The modern world hits me like a double Tyson. The front pages of the tabloids scream about the latest TV reality show. I shake my head at the irony of it: we've just made history by crossing Africa under our own steam, but that's not reality enough. It can't compete with the pretend adventures of television. We glorify and reward the entertainers and actors who play the part of heroes, when so many of the genuine heroes, the real people, struggle every day to survive. We overuse and abuse everything that's common to all—the air, the water, the wilderness, the resources of this finite planet—with total disregard for the needs of others and those who will come after us. Biking across a continent, it seems to me, is a small but significant reminder that there are alternatives. e

Henry Gold lives in Toronto. For more information on next year's Tour d'Afrique, visit www.tourdafrique.com.

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