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“The river is at the same time everywhere, at its source and its mouth, at the waterfall, at the ferry, in the rapids, in the sea, in the mountains, everywhere in every instant, and for him there is only the present, not even the shadow of the past, not even the shadow of the future.”

HERMAN HESSE, *SIDDHARTA*, 1922

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAIGE TAYLOR WHITE



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We tried out the new MET wind tunnel

WORDS BY PAOLO DELLAVESA
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ULYSSE DAESSLE

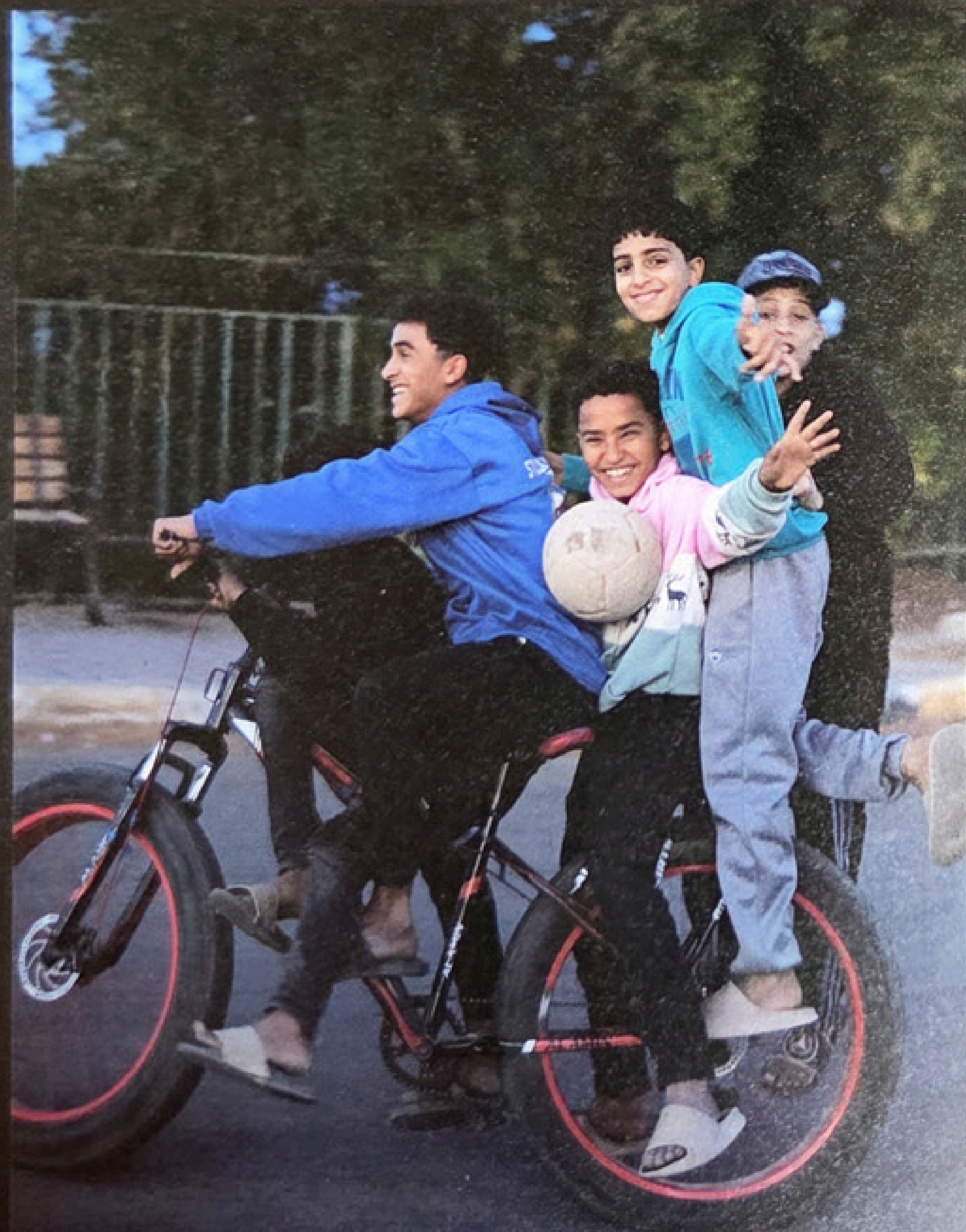
Tour d'Afrique

HOW MUCH WE WANT TO LIVE

WORDS BY LORENZO BOUTALL
PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAIGE TAYLOR WHITE



The Tour d'Afrique is an annual cycling expedition that takes place from January to May, spanning from Cairo to Cape Town, traversing the African continent. This year the route unfolded over 9,000 kilometres, offering participants the chance to discover the culture and beauty of Africa.



Born as a competition, in 2003 it set a Guinness World Record for the fastest crossing of Africa by bicycle. Today, it's an epic journey, where TDA Global Cycling provides comprehensive support including food, bike maintenance and medical assistance, allowing riders to pedal at their own pace, soaking up the scenery while enjoying the company of fellow travellers and the people they meet along the way. I had the privilege of being part of the team as a mechanic in the last edition of this incredible event: an experience so profound it could fill the pages of a book, but I'll try to convey the essence of what it was like in this article.

The Egyptian leg got off to a flying start, thanks to the strong tailwinds that propelled us along the Red Sea coast. On the second day, as *sweep* – meaning last rider of the group – I managed to clock an average speed of 38.9 km/h. The most thrilling experiences, however, were the visits to the historic sites that usually feature in textbooks: the Temple of Luxor, with its towering columns that left me wondering how they were erected over 3,000 years ago, and the Valley of the Kings, with its astonishingly well-preserved hieroglyphics that seemed to have been crafted yesterday. In Luxor, we were treated to a memorable dinner. Our local guides led us to a tiny tavern tucked away in a narrow alley, where we were told we would be eating. The space was so small it was hard to imagine accommodating our entire group, but before we knew it, tables and chairs had been set up in the middle of the street, bringing traffic to a standstill. We ordered a mountain of falafel at a laughable price, and were presented with a rather interesting selection of meat cuts. Naturally, I tried them all, finishing off with a hearty serving of brains.

Continuing along the Nile, we arrived in Aswan, where a place called Elephantine Island was the last thing I expected to encounter. For reasons I've yet to fathom, it has an unmistakable Rastafarian vibe: King Jamaica Restaurant & Café and Bob Marley Moonlight Terrace are just two of the establishments on offer, and strolling through its alleys, you're bound to encounter aromas that bring to mind the Caribbean island.

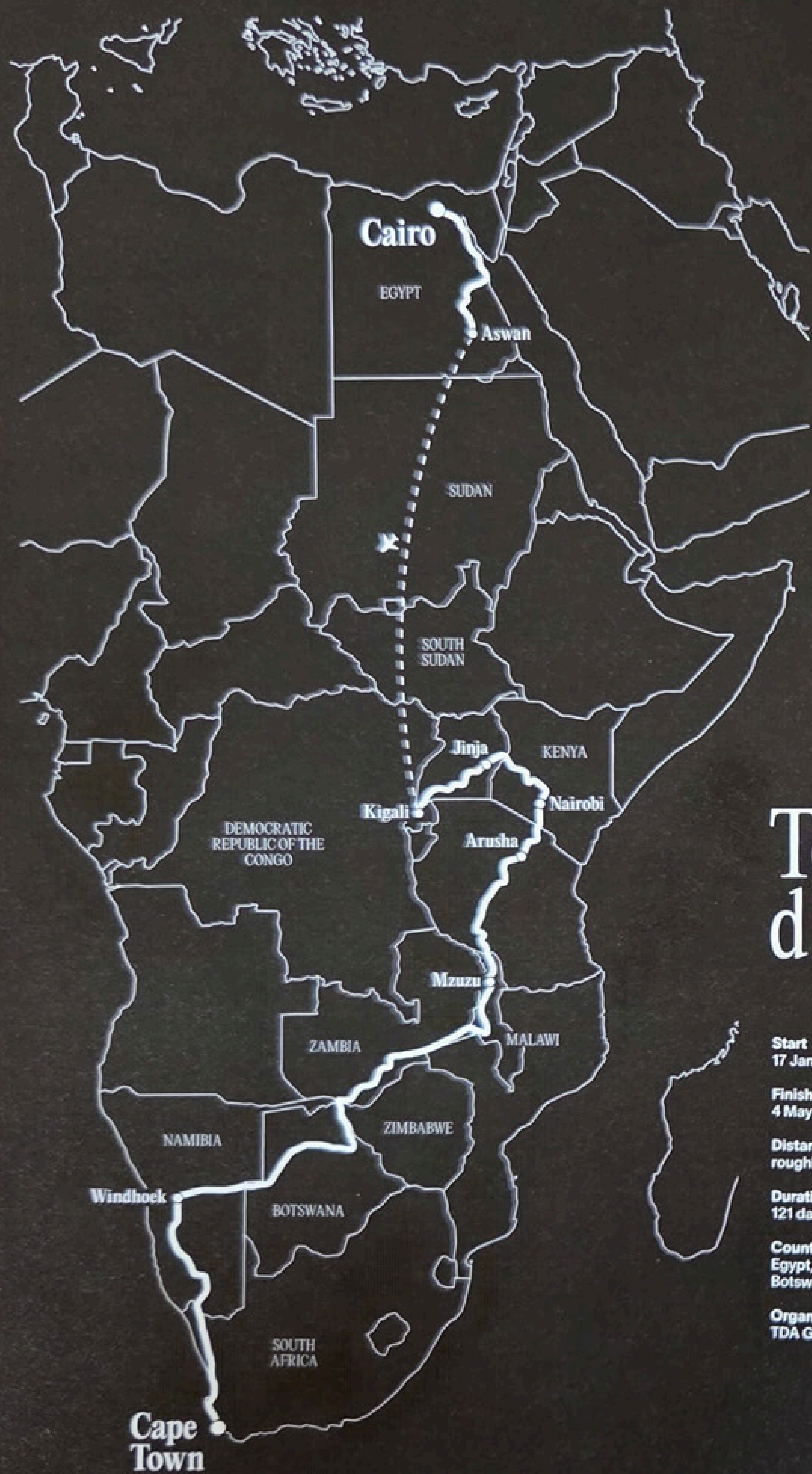
From Aswan, we flew to Rwanda, as the economic and political situation in Sudan and Ethiopia meant we couldn't guarantee the cyclists' safety. Up to this point, everything was unfolding according to plan, but an expedition in Africa wouldn't be worthy of the name if it hadn't thrown up a few unexpected challenges. During our stay in Egypt, rebel offensives by the M23 Movement had broken out in Goma, the regional capital of Congo, near the Rwandan border,

right where we were due to pass through. As a result, the part of the team waiting in Kigali had to set off ahead to map out a new route through Rwanda, from the capital to Musanze that would steer clear of any risks.

Despite the instability of the *land of a thousand hills*, Rwanda proved to be a true cycling oasis: endless ups and downs, smooth asphalt and dreamlike dirt roads. Bicycles are ubiquitous here, used for all manner of transport: getting from A to B, carrying all sorts of produce, providing taxi service and competing in events. In this respect, it could be dubbed the Holland of Africa. The only difference is the inclines, which locals negotiate at speeds of 80 km/h with 80 kg of bananas on the back rack, slowing down by dragging their flip-flops on the front tyre, given their rod brakes rarely work.

Having crossed most of Rwanda, we spent a couple of days relaxing in Musanze, a small town near the Ugandan border and home to the Africa Rising Cycling Center, where the national team trains. Thanks to some contacts, I managed to visit the centre and chat with local and international athletes who were preparing for the Tour of Rwanda. When I arrived at the workshop, one of the mechanics looked me straight in the eye and said: "You look like a kid in a candy shop."

Stage one in Uganda took us to Lake Bunyonyi, the first of many lake landscapes that will characterise our rides through this country. Here we learned that a Rolex isn't just a prestigious Swiss watch, but also a rolled chapati – a sort of flatbread – filled with omelette, vegetables, and avocado, a type of street-food we frequently enjoyed. We also discovered the national sport is billiards: tables are found under makeshift shelters in the most unlikely places, even next to the immigration office on the Uganda-Kenya border. One of the most stunning places to ride was the shore of Lake Victoria, from Entebbe to Jinja. This part of the continent has seen expeditions come and go since Roman times, right up to the more recent ones that located the source of the Nile in the lake: it was surreal to think we'd met it at the start of our journey, some 6,000 kilometres further north. →



Tour d'Afrique

Start
17 January 2025, Giza (Egypt).

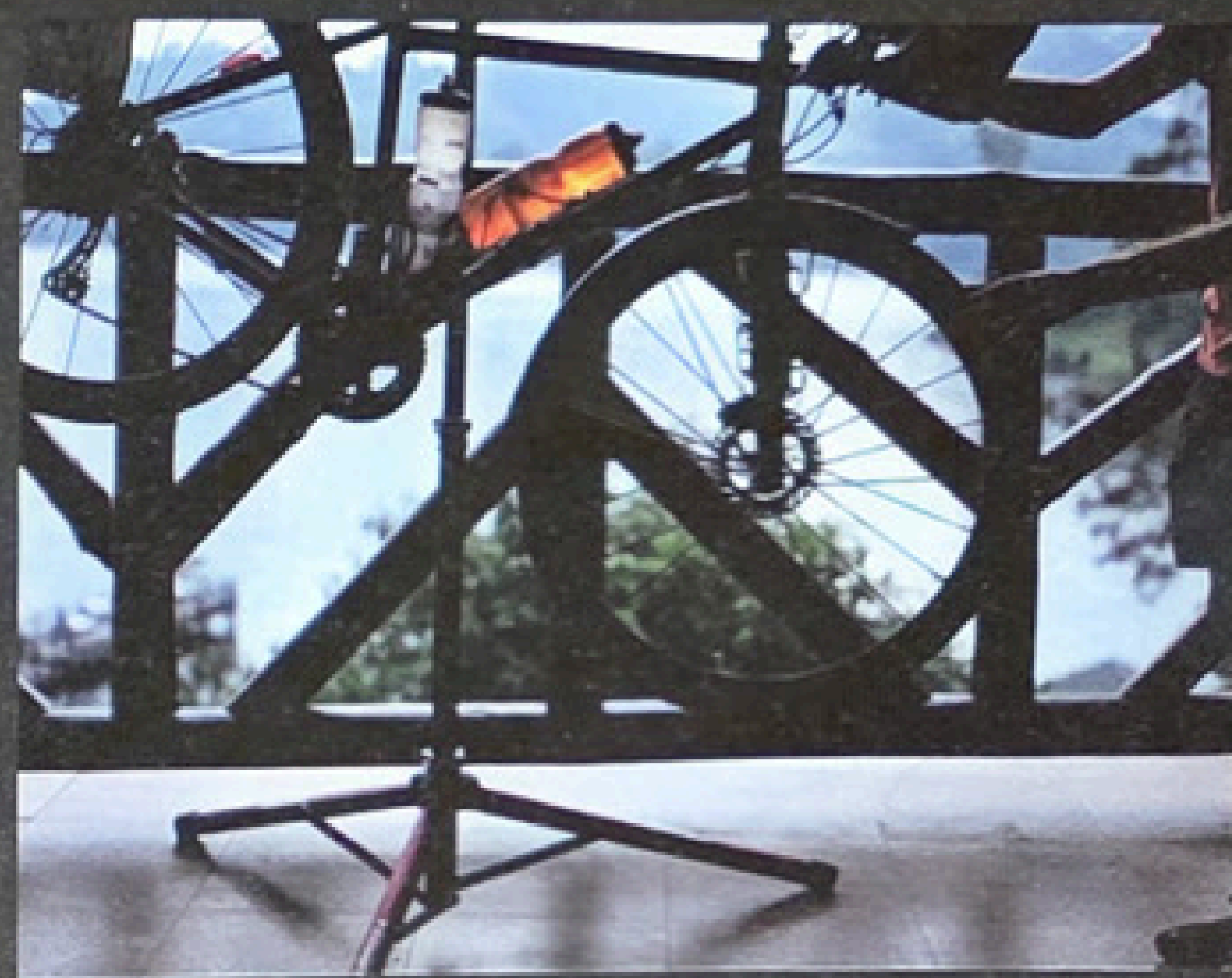
Finish
4 May 2025, Cape Town (South Africa).

Distance
roughly 12,000 km.

Duration
121 days (including rest days).

Countries travelled through
Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa

Organisation
TDA Global Cycling





The lessons learned during these 9,000 kilometres, 76 stages, and 107 days have been many, but the most important one was grasping just how relative time is. In a frenetic world where routine swallows us whole and we can't seem to spare a second, four months go by in the blink of an eye.



Maasai territory, where we'd often haggle with the locals to camp on their land. The final stretch in Kenya was the most spectacular, with Africa's most iconic mountain, Kilimanjaro, right before our eyes.

Our first Tanzanian pit stop was Arusha, a tourist town famous for safaris. Initially, I would've preferred spending my two rest days exploring the area on two wheels, but Dani said, "Are you telling me you are crossing Africa and not planning on seeing lions?" So together we headed to the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, located in the world's largest intact volcanic crater. Here, in just one day, you witness the entire cycle of life, from birth to death: herds of herbivores grazing, lions hunting buffalo, hyenas waiting for their turn, and vultures finishing the job, picking the carcasses clean.

With these images etched in my mind, the next day I decided to finally explore the area by bike, looking for a crater I'd spotted on Google Maps but never found. As I cycled through a Maasai village, I saw the entire population gathering on my left. In seconds, chaos erupted: everyone jumped up and started shouting, kids chasing after me trying to grab my bike. I, fearing I'd end up like the buffalo the day before, stomped on the pedals and shot off.

After Mbeya, we entered Malawi, the sixth country on our tour and the poorest nation on the itinerary. This is where we discovered the true meaning of African hospitality: it's no coincidence it's known as the *warm heart of Africa*, thanks to the kindness of its people. We spent a couple of days cycling along Lake Malawi, eventually reaching Mzuzu, where we camped at Macondo Camp, a little Italian oasis in the middle of Africa. The Ligurian owners, having travelled extensively across the continent, decided to create this haven to welcome long distance travellers. Their forte is the food, and they certainly stuffed me, ensuring I had a reservoir of Italian flavours to see me through to Cape Town.

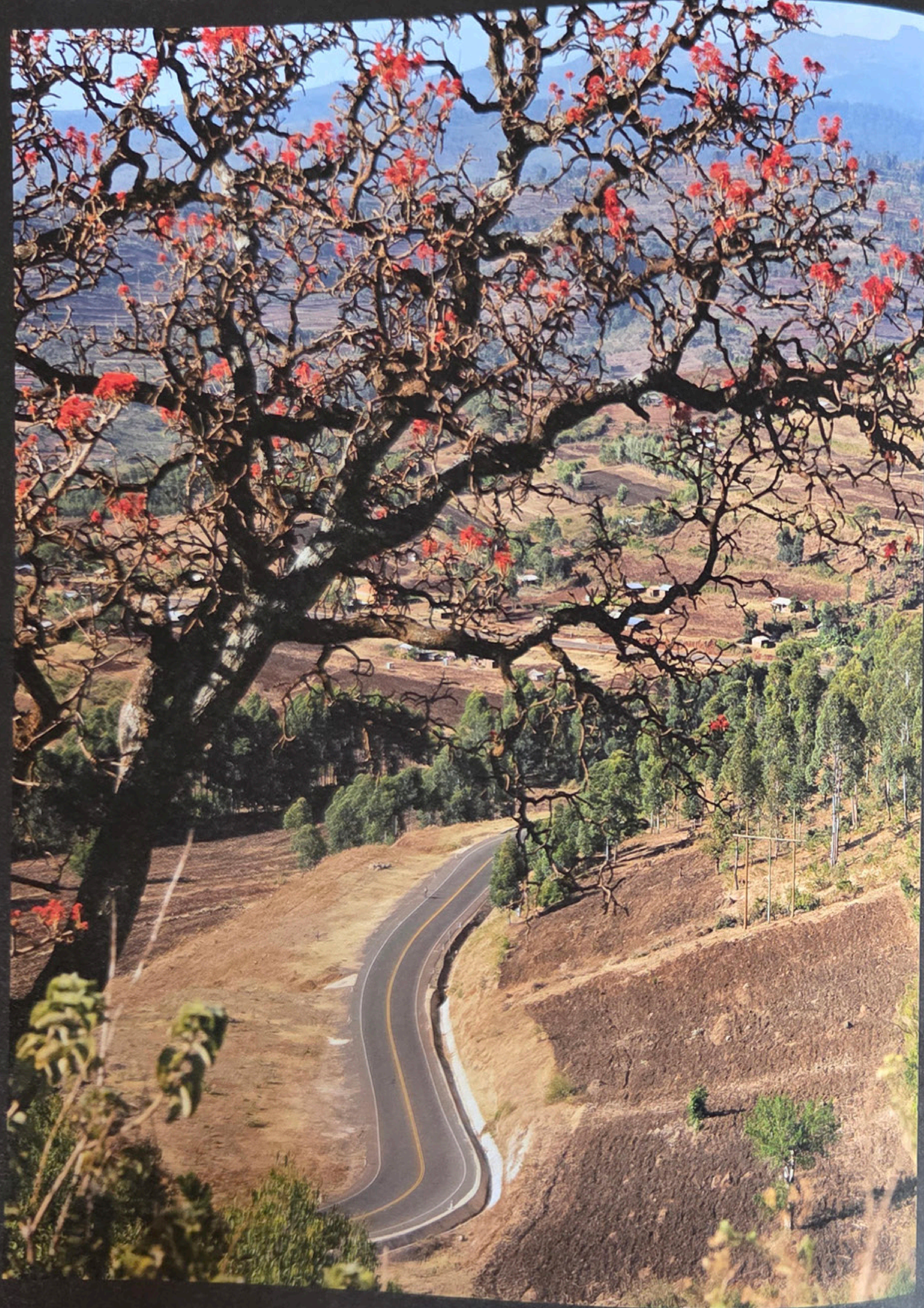
In Zambia, we cycled through a constantly changing landscape, and as we approached Victoria Falls, the scenery grew more mystical. In the distance, mist rose from the turbulent waters, and up close, the spectacle was breathtaking: the Zambezi River plunged into the void with a deafening roar, creating a cloud that rose high into the sky and fell back down as perpetual rain. →

Cycling over the border with Dani, the doctor, I joked, "What have we come to do in Kenya? It looks just like Uganda." Not even 500 metres later, we crested a hill and the savannah unfolded before us: "This is the Africa I've always imagined." Yet, amidst all this splendour, we were the main attraction, the white cyclists; with eyes fixed on us kids were shouting "Mzungu" - meaning white people - from every corner.

The first town we ended up in was Eldoret, renowned for being home to some of the world's best marathon runners. Thanks to one of our riders' contacts, we visited the training camp of the iconic Eliud Kipchoge, the formidable athlete who welcomed us with the humility of a true champion.

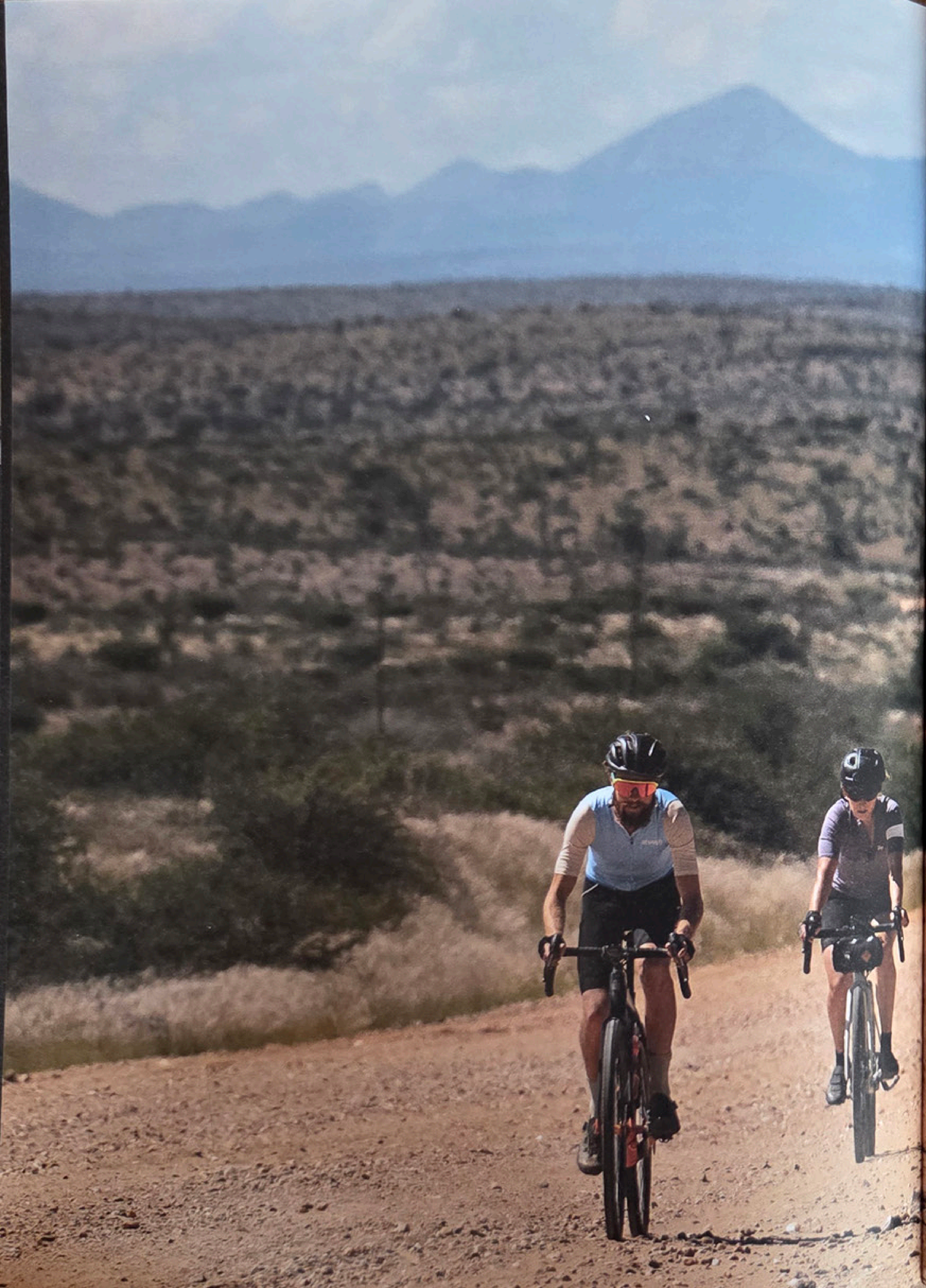
Cycling in Kenya is a unique experience: just look around and you'll see zebras, giraffes, baboons, and elephants, without having to book a safari. Our rest days in Nairobi put our African full immersion experience on pause; here Western influence is alive and well - so much so that walking into a Carrefour felt like stepping through a space-time portal from Nairobi to Burolo, where my local supermarket is. But it was just a brief interlude, because the further south we went, the deeper we ventured into





It's practically impossible to recall the sheer variety of landscapes and scenery that this journey offers. But in one way or another, they remain in your heart and mind.





From Livingstone, we cycled into Botswana, a.k.a. elephant paradise. In Chobe National Park, we had the chance to take a cruise safari along the river of the same name. With a cooler full of beers, we watched elephants, hippos, and crocodiles in their natural habitat until sunset - the perfect setting for an unforgettable aperitif. From here, Botswana became a bit flat, both literally and metaphorically: we cycled the so-called Elephant Highway with zero elevation gain, straight roads, and repetitive scenery. Not a soul on the roadside, but we were expecting to see many elephants. This year, however, they'd decided to give us a miss: it'd been a very wet season, water reserves were full, therefore elephants had kept well clear of the roads trodden by people.

We crossed from Botswana into Namibia, the most daunting leg of the trip: 217 kilometres, a feat for many. For some of the riders, it was the longest distance they'd ever covered on a bike in a single day - the satisfaction in their eyes on arrival was palpable, a genuine sense of having achieved something epic.

When we arrived in Windhoek, it felt like we'd returned to Europe: posh bike shops, hipster cafes, and a predominantly white population. Back at the campsite, I mentioned it to Colleen, our South African tour leader, who rightly pointed out that I'd only seen one side of the city. That evening, a couple of us met Jo Joe Hamunyela, a young Namibian cycling prospect who'd sadly had to give up racing due to financial constraints. Despite being in the same city, it was like a different world: houses were shacks, shops were containers, street food was cooked on trolleys, and everyone was black. It was my first glimpse of the racial socioeconomic divide, which only grew more pronounced heading south, reaching its apex in South Africa.

But when we allow ourselves to slow down, explore the world around us, and stop to chat with a stranger, time expands. It's up to us to decide how much we want to live. ●

Leaving Windhoek, we started the crossing of the Namib Desert, the most captivating and gruelling part of the trip. An extreme stretch, oscillating between elation and agony, punctuated by breathtaking highlights like the Spreetshoogte Pass, the hypnotic beauty of Sossusvlei's dunes and Fish River Canyon - all linked by kilometres of dirt, sand, and rocky tracks, beneath a relentless sun.

Crossing the Orange River, we finally entered South Africa, the tenth and final country of this adventure. What struck me most was how this country is simultaneously the most developed and the most dangerous place we'd encountered. From Egypt to Namibia, I'd never felt threatened, but here I was instantly aware of the need to keep my guard up. That said, it's a stunning place with amazing people, and if *alvento* hadn't made me a job offer during this trip, I'd have seriously considered staying in Cape Town - it had me hooked.

The sight of the ocean, after months of pedalling inland, and Table Mountain, towering in the midst of South Africa's legislative capital, made me reflect on all we'd experienced. It felt like a lifetime had passed since I'd landed in Cairo four months earlier: when you embark on a journey like this, no day is the same. You're hit with new stimuli daily, you experience novel situations, and interact with locals whose ideas, appearance, and ways of thinking are always changing. Time seems to stretch, making a day feel like a week, a week a month, and four months a lifetime. The lessons learned during these 9,000 kilometres, 76 stages, and 107 days have been many, but the most important one was grasping just how relative time is. In a frenetic world where routine swallows us whole and we can't seem to spare a second, four months go by in the blink of an eye.

