

Mount Kenya 10 to 4 Mountain Bike Challenge

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10 to 4 all the way down! Not quite!... 10 to 6 and back up to 9, down to 4 and up to 6 and down to 5 and up to 6 again Thierry moaned in a heavy French accent as he crossed the finish line, sweating and way, way, way after the top riders.

Indeed 10 to 4 as the race starts at 10,000 feet on the slopes of Mt. Kenya and ends up at 4,000 feet in Borana Ranch. This bike challenge attracts people from all walks of life, the young and the old, the fit and the not so fit, the handicap but not handcuffed. And it's all in the name of conservation.

It's still dark. We left Lewa in good time for the 7 o'clock briefing at Borana Village. We know the area well and it's only some 20 km across the conservancy. A black rhino and its calf sleeping in the middle of the road loses us some valuable minutes as we try to manoeuvre around them. Past the swamp at the t-junction, my 'navigator' tells me to turn 'light' when it should have been 'refit'. We can see the fence line separating Lewa and Borana on the distance, but 10 km down the road, it becomes evident that we are heading the wrong way. By now, having completely missed the briefing, we finally make it just in time to film the start of the hardcore race!

Susie , the event organizer gives us our own personal briefing. She's really happy as her idol, professional racing cyclist, several times winner of the Tour de France and famous celebrity presenter for over 3 decades is competing today. Minutes later, we are strapped in the chopper to cover the event from the air.





There are five of us on board, Jamie the pilot, somebody else whom I didn't quite catch his name, but seems to be part of the organizing committee; a paramedic, cameraman from Super sports & myself.

The stunning views subside each other from the arid and rocky grasslands of Borana to the lush green Ngare Ndare forest. We fly over the wheat fields of Kisima until we reach the forest of Mt. Kenya. Sitting on a hill I ask our nameless passenger to point out the famous French guy, if we come across him.

'Which guy?' he says, 'Mitterrand?'

'No! the famous guy...'

'Sarkozy?'

'No! Paul!' I say impatiently.

'Which Paul? I am Paul!'

'No, the other Paul...!' I insist. 'The famous bike rider or was it famous cycling broadcaster!'

'It's me, Paul, Paul Sherwen!'

'No!' I say as my face reddens with embarrassment.

He is actually a great guy with an excellent sense of humour! We have a good laugh before doing a piece to camera.

On the ground, the two Born Free land rovers carrying the honourable members of the press have been lost for hours, and the only cyclists they have seen is the Black Mamba of a farmer going to the village.



Humpty Dumpty had a great ... fall!
Ha!Ha!



Thus, every body is enjoying their own little dramas, with no clue as to how the cyclists are doing. As we sit on top of the mountain, it suddenly dawns on Jamie that it's Valentine and it is now paramount to get some roses organised or heads will roll! Meanwhile, the cyclists ride on to be greeted by the excited cheers erupting from the kids of Ngare Ndare Village. And surely, they are right as they are the main protagonists to be empowered for the safe guard of the environment. Mt. Kenya is now a world heritage site by UNESCO and Ngarendare Forest Reserve & Lewa Wildlife Conservancy are an extension of this site.

The race will soon come to an end. While talking with Paul early this morning, one of the legs of the tripod slowly gave in. Before I noticed, the camera slowly tilted and dropped onto the muddy grass at the start. There was no apparent damage and the camera working normally, we happily jumped in the chopper and took off to film the start.

It will be impossible to overtake the cyclists, so we opt for the long way around and drive back to Timau, and then on to Ethi – two sides of the triangle with a little time to spare for a few pick up shots as the top cyclists ride out of the forest before entering Borana. A fast drive down towards the event village comes to a sudden halt as, at the gate the askari presents his log book – name, vehicle registration, time and date... we are now pressed for time, the first rider will be due any minute. 'ID number' objects the askari as I hand him back his karatasi. 'I can't remember' I answer! "ID" he insists handing the book back to me.

From the top of a hill, we do a few long shots of the first cyclists riding on the dusty trucks of Borana as they head to the finish.

The bikes start to arrive! 3, 4, 10 the camera stops. Battery? No. Tape? No. It will not come back to life. Mario has kindly facilitated Blue Sky Films gear for us to use for the short pilot about the 10 to 4! I feel awful.

It's a great location! A great race! Good fun! A great event! A great cause! Sort your bicycle and see you in Mt Kenya in 2015 for the next 10 to 4!

AB Feb'14



