

Pachyderms no problem for serial adventurer

After completing the Tour D'Afrique from Cairo to Cape Town, Alice Morrison reveals why she never gives up

Alice Morrison has written *Dodging Elephants*, her account of taking part in the Tour D'Afrique and biking across more than 7,400 miles through ten countries from Cairo to Cape Town. Here she offers an insight into the mind of a serial adventurer

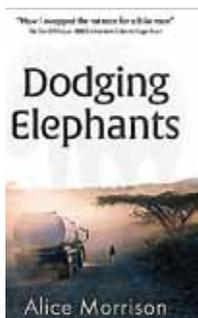
What led you to sign up as a competitor in the Tour D'Afrique, the longest bike race on earth?

I owe a debt of thanks to David Cameron and the Tory government for setting me on the path of adventuring. I was CEO of a quango that was swept away in a round of cuts – subsequently to be replaced by another one, of course. Faced with redundancy, I wanted to turn a negative into a positive and fulfil my dream of going back to the continent where I had spent a lot of my childhood, Africa. Doing it as a competitor in a bike race was a big bonus and led me to change my life entirely.

What, in your experience, is the best way to dodge an elephant?
Get your head down, your legs pumping and ride like “£\$%!”

You've taken part in many challenges, including the Marathon des Sables. What has been the toughest both mentally and/or physically?

Cycling the lava road in Kenya during the Tour D'Afrique has to be one of the hardest days I have endured. We were up and out before dawn, cycling into a gorgeous African sunrise. But by midday the temperature was around 48C. The route was across a wasteland of broken, black lava rock. You had to pedal every turn of the wheels because you were going over rocks, and as you did so, you slammed against the saddle. Northern Kenya was suffering its worst drought for 30 years and people were begging for water by the road. I couldn't give them any because I didn't know how long I



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would be out. At about 3pm the medical truck came past me, loaded with riders who had called it a day. I wanted to stop so badly, but I kept going. There was one tree on that plain, a thorn tree, with no leaves, but I sat under it for five minutes to try and have a rest. The landscape was biblical and not in a happy Jesus kind of way. By this time I was the last one on the road and I had to beat the sunset or get swept up and not finish the stage. Ahead of me was a fellow rider, Sam Guo, and my lowest moment came when I crested a short hill and realised that he was at least half an hour ahead of me... and he was still cycling. Tears leaked out of my eyes, precious water wasted. I was furious at the road, the trip, the sun, but especially at those black rocks. I made it, but it took all I had.

What motivates you to carry on when you want to give up?

You must never, ever give yourself the option to give up. If you give yourself that option, you will take it. I try not to think too far ahead and just focus on the next ten minutes, hour, day – whatever the segment is. It's a good rule for life too.

What's next for you?

I am living in Morocco and am planning a big adventure here later in the year. I have got two ideas that I am developing with www.epicmorocco.co.uk. One is cycling-based and the other involves lots of different ways of getting across some difficult country by any self-powered means I can think of. Whichever one I go for, don't worry, there will be suffering involved. I'll keep you posted.

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