

Melbourne woman defies warring factions and climate to complete 23,000km bike ride across Africa



Feels good to be home: Kate Leeming in Melbourne with the bike that carried her across the continent. Picture: MIKE KEAT

Pedals to the mettle

DETERMINED cyclist Kate Leeming braved gunfire, heat and floods to complete a 23,000km ride through Africa to raise awareness about extreme poverty.

Ms Leeming has just returned home, after being the first person to cycle, albeit in zigzag fashion, from the continent's western-most point — Cape Verde in Senegal — to the eastern tip — Cape Hafun in Somalia — in one journey.

The seasoned 43-year-old cyclist began her epic ride last October, covering as much as 130km in up to eight hours in the saddle each day.

"There were many tough times, every day some sort of crisis on the bike," she said. "But I am experienced enough to cope with that."

Ms Leeming, who kept an online diary throughout the trip, visited projects aimed at tackling problems in impoverished communities.

They included an education program for girls and women in Burkina Faso, work to reclaim farmland lost to the desert in Nigeria, and a rights and dignity project in Cameroon.

Wes Hosking

She plans to make a TV doco and write a book about the experience.

"There is no one specific issue," she said. "Every situation is quite complex."

"What I would ultimately be really pleased about is if I can help educate and inspire others to make a difference themselves."

The Kew woman really showed some pedal power when her team, accompanied by a military escort, came under gunfire from rebels west of Brazzaville in the Republic of the Congo.

"It gave me a bit of a shock," Ms Leeming said.

"The best way to get through that is get to the end as soon as possible."

Her *Breaking the Cycle* journey is just the latest for Ms Leeming. She has ridden 15,000km through Europe, cycled across Russia and completed a 25,000km trip around Australia, as the first woman to cross the Canning Stock Route by bike.

She already has an idea for the next adventure — but says it will be a lot shorter.

Net link: www.btcycle.com



I've done it: She holds her bike aloft on the Somalia coast. Picture: KATE LEEMING

