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In an effort to break the cycle, is Kew's own African queen

22,000km across 20 countries in 11 months

AFRICA

Adventurer | Bianca Camosa

BEING fired on by heavily armed rebels and crossing disputed borders couldn't stop a Kew woman from cycling across Africa.

In what's believed to be a world first, Kate Leeming cycled from Africa's most westerly to easterly points across 20 countries in 11 months.

Ms Leeming, with a support crew, cycled at least 120km for up to eight hours each day to complete the 22,000km journey, from Senegal in the west, arriving last month in the Horn of Africa in the east.

Her adventure included crossing a disputed zone between Somaliland and Puntland, carrying a pistol while riding to ward off hyenas, and cycling through torrential rain.

But she said being shot at in the Republic of Congo at the 10,000km mark of the journey was a reality check.

"I jumped a bit when I heard it ... I had to cycle past the soldiers; I went a bit faster than normal for the rest of that day," Ms Leeming said.

The 43-year-old said the expedition aimed to raise awareness about the plight of Africa's poor.

"The purpose of the project was to learn firsthand about the causes and consequences of extreme poverty," she said.

She visited community development programs that "give a leg up, not a hand out", including farmer-managed regeneration projects and women's education initiatives.

Ms Leeming said she hoped the expedition would inspire people to explore the world for themselves and to make a difference in whatever way they could. Ms Leeming is no stranger to epic adventures; she became the first woman to cycle across Russia unsupported in 1983 and also completed a 25,000km Australian outback expedition.

Kew's Kate Leeming on the road to Timbuktu, Mali.




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