



Grant Clark and the travelling book

Cape Town cyclist Grant Clark shares how his love for cycling and reading led him on an epic journey from Cairo to Cape Town to raise awareness and funds for childhood literacy.

WORDS: GRANT CLARK

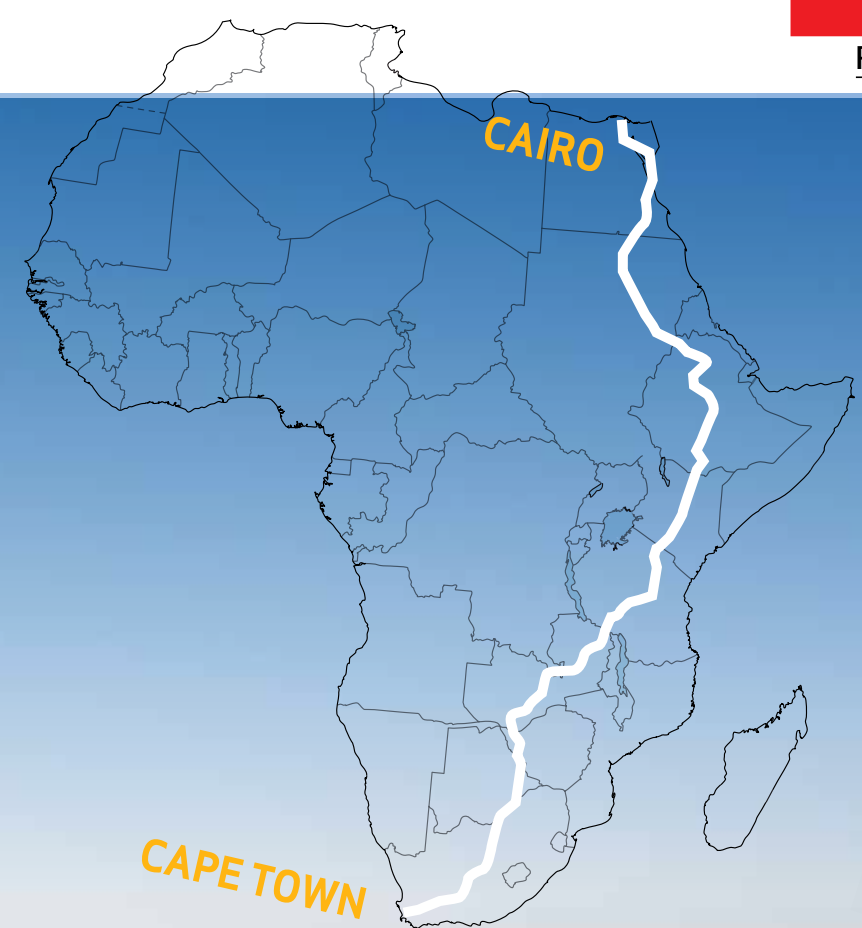
“I am a born-and-bred Capetonian – not sure if that’s a plus or not, but it is the best city in the world. My mates and family – especially my old man, with a deep sigh – will tell you that I’ve always been much better at sports activities than I have been at business endeavours. When it was clear that my springboard diving career and then my touch rugby career weren’t going to shower me with the glory, riches and free stuff that I craved, I turned to cycling. I’ve since fallen in love with a sport that is one of the purest forms of transport you can get, and probably the most popular mode of transport in Africa.

Recently, and with a growing passion for the impact that literacy levels in

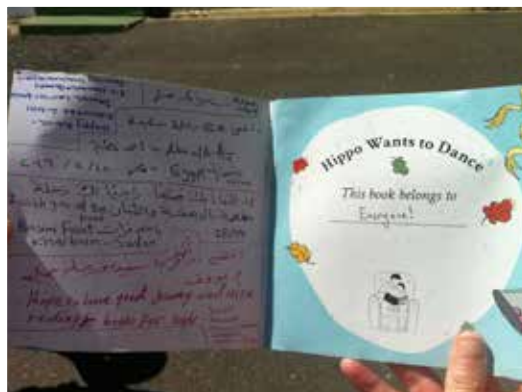
Africa have on education and general knowledge, I’ve looked for ways to help inspire more children to read and discover the world of books. I am also in the process of writing a children’s adventure novel.

When I was a laatie, I was a proper bookworm. I loved to get lost in the adventures of books and their characters. That love for reading has endured. While looking for a way to give back in some way, I was introduced to Shine Literacy and the work it does with children across South Africa. It felt like a perfect fit.

I started volunteering for Shine at Zonnebloem Primary School in Cape Town at the beginning of 2016. Shine Literacy works closely with another



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ABOUT SHINE LITERACY

Shine provides training and other programmes to schools, parents, caregivers and local communities that support children to become good readers and writers, while building their confidence, self-esteem and appetite for learning. The programmes help to transform the prospects of some of South Africa's most vulnerable children by breaking the destructive cycle of poor literacy, low education achievement, wasted potential and poverty.

www.shineliteracy.org.za

local initiative called Book Dash, which creates, produces and distributes original stories for African kids.

ON MY WAY

On 17 November 2016, I set off from Cairo to Cape Town to raise funds and awareness for Shine Literacy. I asked Book Dash for some books, which I packed onto my bike and used as a way to connect with other literacy initiatives in Africa. I also used the illustrated books for talks at schools and gave some away while I cycled across the continent. The books and story of my trip gave me an opportunity to chat to some amazing people along the way, and gain insight into some Africa's literacy challenges.

I struggled with countless punctures, long days of relentless hills, bumpy roads, aggressive locals, connectivity issues, and a broken bike on my travels. I also experienced the most incredible hospitality, company and kindness from Africans from all walks of life, exquisite scenery, and amazing adventures. Most importantly, my message and the books I took along from Book Dash were received very well.

STARRY NIGHTS

One of the most memorable moments on my journey is of when I went solo camping in the Sahara in Sudan. It was the most incredible personal experience. The stars made me feel almost

claustrophobic. They were so clear and there were just so many of them. The scale of it all, with little ol' me in this massive desert blanketed by a billion stars... It will be difficult to top that experience.

The second most memorable experience was when a curious camel accidentally wandered into my tent at 3am. I leapt up inside the tent and just started running. The camel got a huge fright and sprinted off in the opposite direction.

There were a few tough moments on the trip too. My bike's rear derailleur broke, as I was about to exit Sudan. It meant that I had to limp through the top of Ethiopia with the constant

anxiety that the bike would break completely and my trip would be over before I managed to get it repaired. I also had very tight timeframe to get down the continent and thus was always under pressure to reach my daily targets and get to my next destination. That meant cycling in all kinds of weather, whether I was feeling good or not. Some days it was difficult to motivate myself to get going in the morning.

HOME SWEET HOME

On 6 March 2017, I arrived at the Shine Literacy Centre at Zonnebloem College in Cape Town. Having handed out books and the message of the importance of childhood literacy all the way down

Africa. I've been cycling up a storm since my return. I cycled in the Cape Town Cycle Tour and ABSA Cape Epic, and took part in IRONMAN South Africa. My goals were to raise and spread awareness of Shine Literacy, look for additional children's books for its various school libraries and raise R50 000. We have raised R52 000. This has enabled Shine to fund one of their biggest library projects of the year.

So, what's next on my bucket list? I need a nap first, and then I'll start thinking about that. I've always been fascinated by stories of travel to Antarctica and the South Pole, and so it's definitely an area of the planet I'd like to explore at some point." □

THE CYCLING TIMES OF GRANT CLARK

1978

Aged two, I receive a brand new red plastic pushbike. I keep going much too fast. My mother goes prematurely grey.

1982

The training wheels come off the bicycle for the first time. Freedom.

2003

After a knee operation, I'm reintroduced to cycling, as it is the first form of rehab and activity I can do.

2006

I go on my first bike-packing trip, a two-week cycle across Spain, following the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route.

2012

I take part in my first Coronation Double Century ride (202km).

2015

Aged 39, I take part in my first IRONMAN South Africa race.

2016

I create the Afrikalegburn initiative and cycle from Cairo to Cape Town.

2017

Almost 12 000km later and after a stupidly long run at the end, I finish three more challenges, namely the Cape Town Cycle Tour, ABSA

Cape Epic and IRONMAN South Africa for Shine Literacy.