

Mark Beaumont at Edinburgh Mountain Film Festival

by Thomas Haywood

☒ There was much anticipation at the Edinburgh Mountain Film Festival on Sunday night as Mark Beaumont, the Round the World Cyclist and broadcaster, gave the keynote talk about cycling down the Americas to an eager audience. In his address he showed several unseen clips about his travels including some shots from his Round the World Cycling record.

On his round the world attempt, he said that it was not about breaking it but his initial target was 195 days (the old record was 276 days) which meant that he had to do 125 miles per day. There were many stumbling blocks along the way, some cultural, others more mechanical or physical.

Initially he had to keep pestering the BBC to give him a camera and after a while they came round to the idea and said that they would do a 30 minute documentary on BBC2 but by the time he got halfway (Perth, Australia) they were talking about 4 episodes on BBC1 !

He said it took a long while to come back down after arriving back in Paris. He had a lot of discomfort walking as he was superfit for one purpose but not the other. He had a lot of physiotherapy and Hydrotherapy to aid this. He also had to get out of the mindset of cycling all day long.

There were plans he said to attempt a world rowing record from New York to Falmouth however his plans were scuppered, quite literally when the boat sank with another crew in it.

Americas

The BBC wanted to do more. They rang him and said "Mark we

know you have nothing to do this year, do you want to do the Americas?"

✘ Mark had three months to plan the whole trip, which was tight, but he did not want to race down it as he wanted to see more and take time along the way to meet the people. The continent is huge 13-14,000 miles from top to bottom. Combined with this he wanted to take time out to climb Mt McKinley (Dinali) in North America and Mt Aconcagua in the South within 6 months cycling between the two. This had never been done before. Both peaks are over 6000 m and had a low summiting success rate. He also said that he had never climbed Ben Nevis before (still has not yet!) so could not claim to be a mountaineer

Being a mountaineer means that you focus from being alone on a bike to being in a team dependent on each other. There is a lot of time hanging around on the mountain acclimatising and 3 weeks was required to climb Dinali but 3 days to come down. The weather changes fast and if you slip at altitude the consequences are serious. This was brought home when he saw 2 climbers fall to their death and he was helpless to do anything. He successfully reached the summit in a blizzard.

On getting back on the road he had to maintain his fitness by doing circuits every day after his 100mile ride to maintain fitness for mountain climbing. Additionally he had to do a lot of media interviews on his webcam/satellite and do a lot of social media work. This proved to be time consuming and often distracting. He also had to do many additional miles to recover video cameras for shots of the ride.

Staying safe was a real issue in Mexico and he had to have an escort through the dangerous areas. He also got caught in some ferocious rainstorms there too.

He was forced to cut out part of his ride through Ecuador due to the tight time schedule to Mt Aconcagua which he achieved

having ridden through the Atacama Desert.

Aconcagua was a tough climb with "High camp" at 19,000 feet and only 42% of oxygen (in comparison to that found at sea level) at the summit. He managed to summit it in eleven and a half days (only 35% of climbers manage to reach the summit each year) but had blisters in the roof of his mouth due to breathing the cold air through his mouth.

Having come down from the Mountain it was a bit of an anticlimax to have to get back on the bike and do another 2,500 miles to Tierra del Fuego. However, it was not without its challenges; ferocious winds made it too difficult to cycle some days however he had to keep going by pushing his bike when that happened.

Reaching the finish was totally different from the Media reception of Paris; there was no-one else there when he arrived there in February 2010

So what's next for Mark Beaumont?

He's writing a book about his trip down the Americas and more importantly there is another trip. He will be taking part on a BBC expedition next year, a big journey that does not involve a bike of up to 35,000 miles. What or where, he was not at liberty to say.

Thomas Haywood is an Edinburgh based photographer and you can see his work on his website [here](#).