

Mayflower chief bikes across the wild and windy land of ice and fire

Riding a bike for five days does not sound like everyone's idea of fun but Mike Allison, managing director of Mayflower, took up the challenge. He said: "Like most things in life that seemed like a good idea at the time this adventure turned into something quite different. If it wasn't for my fellow bike riders and support team, I don't think I could have got through the toughest five days of my life."

Aiming to raise £5,000 for St Luke's Hospice in Basildon – a long standing client of Mayflower – Allison arrived at his destination on the outskirts of Akureyri, in Iceland, along with 21 other bikers, to face last month's biking challenge. Prior to this latest fund raising venture, two employees took part in a trek to Nepal and raised over £5,000. In November they are off again to Vietnam to take part in a 10-day jungle trek. Although this was Allison's first venture of this kind. He commented: "There was an amount of excitement prior to the trip however this was overshadowed by anticipation. During our five days on the road I experienced extreme fatigue, tired muscles and long periods of loneliness whilst riding alone as the group spread out."

Here's Allison's first hand, day-by-day account of the Icelandic adventure...

Day one:

The bike ride started at Langafell at an altitude of 250 metres. The first day we covered 42km over hilly terrain, and we had a number of rivers to cross, which we had to do

by foot. We cycled up to the top of a plateau, which was at 900 metres elevation, where we were rewarded by beautiful views of the glacier. Today's hut is the smallest – the whole group sleeping together in one room. No showers, but we all took advantage of the natural heated pool outside.

Day two:

It was windy, stormy and rainy. The first 10-15kms was undulating but achievable. There were two main rivers to cross. There was a great view of the third largest glacier in the world. At 15kms we cycled towards snow capped mountains, and yet more glaciers. We broke for lunch at 24kms but there was no shelter from the elements. The end of the day's journey saw a few hills, but good dirt roads heading towards the glaciers. We headed to the south west side of the mountain where the hut was situated. The landscape turned lush and green the last stretch was extremely punishing.

Day three:

Today we left camp and cycled on flat terrain. It reminded me of a lunar landscape and the road was a good



Mike Allison

dirt track. At 24 kms we saw a great lookout point where the road split. At 30 kms we had a fantastic view of a big glacier lake. The terrain undulated on sandy tracks and we crossed a bridge to finish by a mountain hut. From here we transferred onto the buses for our drive to the mountain hut (approximately 30 kms), we passed many glacier lakes and man-made dams and great views of the Masifs. The mountain hut we stayed in was the best one so far. There were showers inside, triple bunks and fantastic views of Iceland's most active volcano – Helka.

Day four:

This is the second part of the challenge. The group transferred for 30 minutes and then started cycling on flat good dirt roads heading to Helka. When we ascended and

reached the top at an altitude of 689 metres the views were amazing. We stopped for lunch at 21km and headed off between two craters. The terrain started to undulate and we cycled through the lips of the crater. At 25km we crossed some snow and a field full of lava. After a rest stop at 37km we headed downhill and experienced amazing views of a lake (where the local people fish). We crossed a river where we had to push or carry our bikes. The last part of the journey was uphill with great views of the mountains and we crossed over the most famous trekking path in Iceland.

Day five:

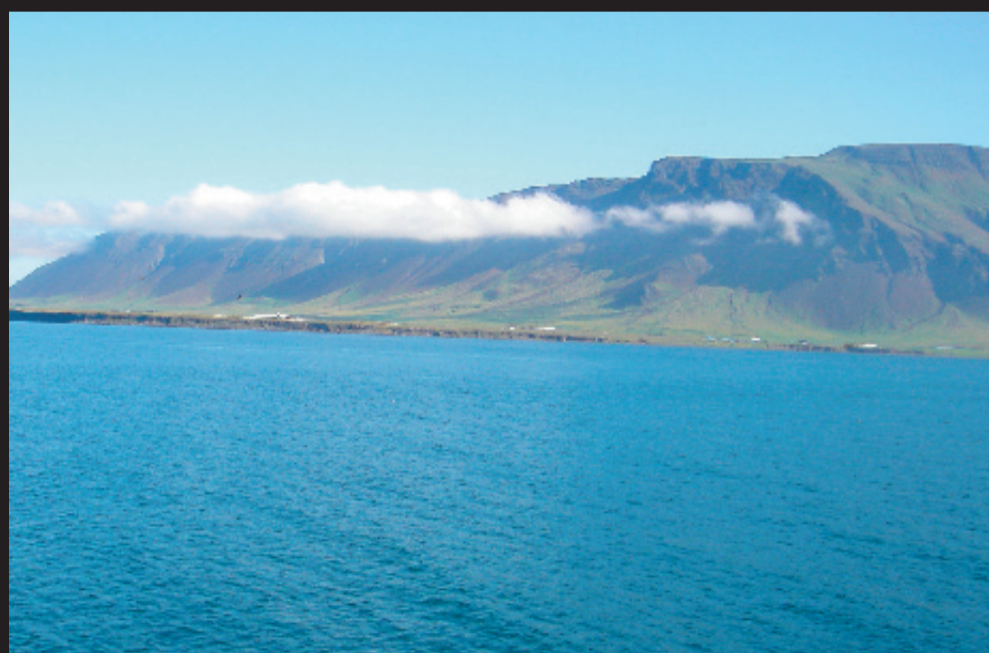
Today we left the camp on flat terrain with views of the glacier to the front. We crossed a river, which had a footbridge so we pushed our bikes over. The first 17kms was flat downhill with bumpy terrain until we reached a bridge. We rested and then descended to the finish line and had lunch at Bolstaar.

Allison commented after his journey: "Having successfully completed the trip I would recommend it to others. However, I would advise that the correct amount of training be put in prior to the event. This is an area I didn't give too much consideration to which resulted in the whole exercise being a lot harder than it should have been. I hope to be involved in a harder or bigger challenge on behalf of the Hospice in the future – watch this space."

To sponsor Allison go to www.justgiving.com/mikeallison



A stormy day, but great views of the third largest glacier in the world.



After the trip, most riders enjoyed a whale-watching excursion.