



NEWS OF THE DAY

31 May 2019

He crossed Africa on bicycle!

by [Covasna Media](#) | 2024 views



He cycled across Africa!

A former athlete from Sfântu Gheorghe cycled 11,800 km in one trip

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superhuman from Cape Town to Port Said

- **After spending his youth in Sfântu Gheorghe, as a performance athlete of the local sports club, Cornel Manuel Mancaş emigrated to the United States, and last year, at the age of 45, he lived the adventure of his life!**

Cornel Manuel Mancaş was part of the "golden generation" of athletics from Covaş. In the 90s, athletes from CSM Sfântu Gheorghe represented Romania's elite in the semi-distance events and the titles of national, Balkan or even European champions were the order of the day. Manuel ran 800 metres under the guidance of coach Sânta Carol and the sport made him call Sfântu Gheorghe home. The years passed, his sporting career ended and like many other athletes, Mancaş chose to start from scratch, crossing the ocean and emigrating to the United States, where he ended up working as an accountant. A new start, a completely different life, in search of financial stability.

But after a while, when the certainty of tomorrow is no longer an issue, you may want to give a new meaning to life, to do something that makes you different, something that matters and makes you feel that you have not lived in vain. At such a moment, Cornel made perhaps the hardest decision of his life - to go on a journey that would not only test his limits, but that could make him really get to know himself. The story of this adventure is full of fascinating episodes, some of which we managed to capture in this interview.

How did you come up with the idea of such a trip?

I wanted to do something different! What hasn't been done. I was sitting on the couch, watching a documentary about a bicycle race in which amateurs were crossing from the west coast of America, across the continent to the east coast. That's when it hit me. At the time I didn't know if anyone had done it before, but I was sure that no Romanian had ever done it before. I was shocked because I didn't believe that a normal person could make such an effort and I wondered if I could do it.

And so began the story of cycling across Africa from south to north (!!!), backwards than the few daredevils who try to avoid the headwind. Why did you choose Africa?

Africa is different, Europe and America are "boring" in the sense that the infrastructure is good, the risks are minor. I'm very impulsive so in less than two months I had my route mapped out, bought my equipment, my plane ticket and quit my job. I left in 12

January. 108 days and 2 hours full of adventurous stories followed. At the start I bathed my feet in the Atlantic, at the end I rested in the Mediterranean.

What were your first moments in Africa like?

Although the last weeks before departure were marked by all kinds of thoughts, anxieties, once we landed in Africa we went into survival mode. It's incredible how the human brain works and how you react when you are put in a tight situation. The solution was to think typically African, short term, focus on what you have to do the next day. The beginning was difficult because I had quite a lot of extra weight. I was doing around 100 km a day in the beginning. Then I lost about 20 kilos and ended up walking 200 kilometres a day, almost naturally.

The most interesting experiences?

Contact with the animals in Botswana was unforgettable. I heard the lion a few steps away, met elephants, all kinds of animals and was left with feelings I will hardly forget. I arrived in Malawi somewhat by chance, I had deviated from the route hearing that it was a very beautiful country. I didn't do my "homework" very well and ended up in a natural park full of animals. Here the rangers forced me to take the bus. I "dealt" with the driver and rode with him only 150 meters, then as the guards didn't see me, I got off and continued on my bike. I had set my own rules, which involved doing all, but absolutely all of the journey on my bike, without any means of transport, without any support.

Have you ever felt unsafe on your journey?

Oddly enough, although there have been times when it has been risky or when I have felt fear, I don't think I have ever questioned the threat to my life. I was careful to follow main roads, to avoid bad areas and neighborhoods. It was the cultural differences that made for the stranger moments. I felt this in Ethiopia, when I often had people, especially children, throw stones at me. Violence of this kind was not uncommon there.

We also had a difficult stretch in an area of northern Kenya between Isiolo and Moyale, an area where herders were "equipped" with AK47 machine guns, which were originally intended to protect them from potential Somali terrorists. Near Marsabet I experienced this first hand with a local man with a gun in his hand who asked me for water, but I got away from him quickly enough.

Another complicated episode took place in Sudan. I was hit by a car, fractured my

coast, I suffered leg injuries and my ego was badly bruised. I hitchhiked to the first police station, repaired my bike (partially), and the next day took a taxi back 20km to the crash site so I could continue the unbroken Cape Town-Port Said line. I couldn't deviate from my own rules.

What was harder to manage? The physical effort or the mental effort?

I think the physical part is easier to take, the effort is trainable, the body adjusts. But a mental breakdown is much harder to overcome. I had my first such experience after the fifth day of the trip. I was in South Africa and the thought crossed my mind that after crossing the border into Namibia I would get on a plane and go home. The second downfall was in Ethiopia, where I had extremely bad food poisoning. I ended up in hospital and felt so bad, I thought I wouldn't be able to go all the way. Physically, the hardest part was crossing the Sahara. The desert is like a beast hunting you. I walked against the wind, at 8km/h, in terrible heat, it was brutal. But that's probably why the desert remains one of the most memorable parts of my adventure.

How did you do with the food?

You adapt along the way. Of course at first I messed up my whole digestive system. And because of the exertion, but also through diet. In countries like South Africa or Egypt, you had options similar to those in Europe or America, but in the real Africa, in the heart of the continent, in Zambia, in Malawi, countries that are poor but very welcoming, I had few options. I ate a lot of beans, vegetables, I managed.

Any legal problems? Were the authorities okay everywhere?

In Egypt I was escorted by police for almost 500 km. I exasperated them. They wanted to put my bike on the car, and I refused because I was near the end and I really wanted to respect the rules. And so it still haunts me and frustrates me terribly that 150 yards of the whole trip was not on the bike. That's it, it's over, there's no going back there. The world record holder for crossing Africa, Irishman Mark Beaumont, who travelled from north to south, took just 41 days to complete the journey, but 1km was covered by car. He had a bridge in Egypt that he was not allowed to cycle over.

Even though it took me a lot longer, especially because I went from south to north, at least I only had 150m where I wasn't on my bike.

What has been the greatest accomplishment related to this adventure?

The greatest satisfaction was that I made my son very proud. I sent him my location and pictures every day. His classmates knew about the trip, followed my journey, and that made him the star of the school for a while. Everyone asked him about his unusual father. He was very excited about what I had achieved. And I'm glad I didn't let him down.

Does such an adventure cost a lot?

A pittance compared to what you earn in a lifetime working. My budget was just over \$6,000, about as much as I would have spent in three months at home.

What's next?

Africa changes your life, you see everything with new eyes and you are more grateful for everything you have. It's a journey I'm now trying to write a book about. But it also whetted my appetite. It wasn't easy to find something grander and more special. I want to cross the globe, following Guinness Book rules, which would mean 10 to 12 months on a bike, almost non-stop. No Romanian has ever done that. I'm getting ready now and hope to hit the road in 2020.

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8.0 °C

in Sfantu gheorghe (mountain)

Wind : **0.8 m/s, direction : NNE**

Cloudiness : **partly cloudy sky**

Pressure : **955.8 mb, variable** Relative humidity : **88%**

image/svg+xml

5.7 °C

in Intorsura buzaului

Wind : **0.9 m/s, direction : SSE**

Cloudiness : **partly cloudy sky**

Pressure : **936.3 mb, variable** Relative humidity : **88%**

image/svg+xml

10.1 °C

in Brasov ghimbav

Wind : **1.4 m/s, direction : N**

Cloudiness : **partly cloudy sky**

He cycled across Africa!

Pressure : **954.2 mb, variable**

Relative wetness : **84%**

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