

American Traveler Conquers World's 'Toughest Bike Race' in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan

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Whether or not Bhutan's 166-mile high-altitude, all-terrain, ultra-endurance mountain bike challenge, known as the Tour of the Dragon, is in fact the 'toughest single-day bike race' in the world is still up for debate.



But the reality is that only a few Americans have ever completed the Tour of the Dragon course, which boasts over 23,000 vertical feet of climbing (Mt Everest is 29,000 feet from sea level) and an average riding elevation of over 8,000 feet, successfully in a single day of riding



According to the Bhutan Olympic Committee, which has produced this ultra-endurance biking challenge since 2010, American competitor Ian O'Sullivan was the last finisher of the 2015 Tour of the Dragon, and although technically disqualified for missing a minimum cut-off time, O'Sullivan still

remains one of the few Americans in the world, who can claim to have conquered this legendary course.

"With only 15 day of training prior to the race I never really intended to finish the course," O'Sullivan said.

Additionally, a massive construction project left many sections of the 2015 course unpaved and muddy. And post-monsoon weather conditions and race day showers made the route, which features three Himalayan mountain passes to summit over 10,000 feet, extra challenging.

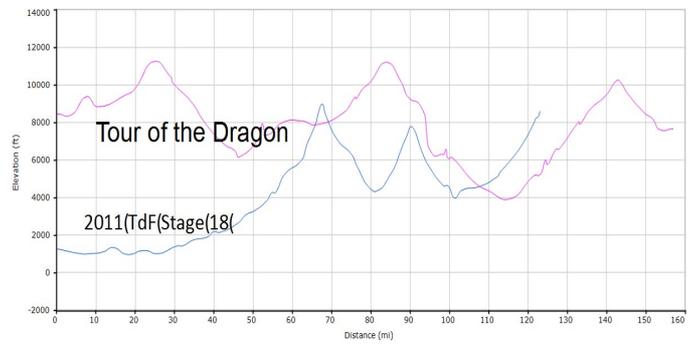




"It's really not just the distance, but the altitude, the weather and the road conditions that makes this race so unpredictably challenging." said rider Pelden Dorji, who finished with stitches after a failure with his headlamp caused him to crash during the first predawn descent.

Endurance racing at high altitudes can easily impair your judgment – and this could be fatal on the temptingly fast and windy downhill segments," said local rider Sonam, winner of the 2010 Tour of The Dragon and head coach of the SMBA Bhutan Youth Cycling Club.

Compared to the hardest stage of the 2011 Tour de France, the Tour of the Dragon proves 40 miles longer, with significantly more vertical climbing - all done in high-altitude, thin air conditions over 5,000 feet – and on mountain bikes.



As a former Ironman triathlon finisher in 2013, O'Sullivan didn't come into the Tour of the Dragon completely unprepared –although nothing could have prepared him for adventure that was about unfold.

"I was actually participating in the race as an event co-sponsor, representing my travel company Alternative Escapes, which organizes private group adventures to Bhutan," he said. "

"My intention was to make it to the first major town, just 80 Kilometers from the start. But once the sun came up, the natural beauty of Bhutan and excitement of riding mountain bike through the Himalayas, inspired me so much I kept riding just to see what was around the next corner – and 20 hours later I arrived at the finish line."

"It was an unexpected and a surreal surprise," he continued. *"I never imagined a race this long would be so much fun and such an epic adventure."*

About the Author: Ian O'Sullivan, Professional Travel Educator

Ian O'Sullivan founded Alternative Escapes in 2014 as the pre-eminent travel education and adventure planning company for people seeking transformative, life-changing adventures.

As a former Marketing Manager for Bloomberg LP, Ian was inspired to leave corporate life on Wall Street to create a new model for the socially-conscious traveler who wants to explore the world while helping improve it.

Ian currently leads Alternative Escape Media Development group, creating original eco-cultural film scripts and developing reality-travel show pilots at his private-access adventure locations around the world.