

Cyclists feel the heat in tough Tour d'Afrique

COURTNEY BROOKS

THE Tour d'Afrique cyclists will arrive in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, on Saturday evening, marking the end of the first leg of their trip.

The riders have been cycling through two extremes in Sudan; the lush banks of the Nile and the desolate deserts, said staff rider Chris Boehner, by e-mail.

"This area of Sudan is originally home to the Nubians. The men are fairly dark-skinned and tall, and dressed in white robes and head coverings. The women are beautiful in their colourful robes. They smile and greet us warmly," Mel Miller, a Capetonian, wrote in her blog on January 25.

"What has not changed from the Egyptian leg is the five-times-a-day wailing of muezzins, falafels, and other pearls of Arabian culture," Boehner said. "Africa has shown its face. Some riders are overjoyed in leaving the tarmac while others are realising just how difficult it will be to cycle across the 'Dark Continent'."

Cycling through Sudan was hard on the riders, Boehner said. Patches of gravel, ruts from past floods, and deep sand were all very challenging.

"The tour has been fabulous but it is much more difficult than I thought it would be," said Erika de Jager, a South African.

The group will rest in Khartoum before starting the next section, "The Gorge", on Monday. This section, which is 1 525km long, is a particularly punishing trek which will take them to Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, on February 20.

courtney.brooks@inl.co.za



SHADOW PLAY: Riders taking part in the Tour d'Afrique take advantage of the cool early morning air as they cycle through Sudan's Nubian Desert en route to Khartoum. They are expected to reach the Sudanese capital on Saturday evening.

Picture: TOUR D'AFRIQUE