

## OUR LAST FINISHER ANSWERS TO OUR QUESTIONS 19-05-2023

Wim Van Els Just claimed its 1000th BIG. He is a finisher. We asked him our usual questions.

### 1) What are your feelings reaching the arrival ?

It's not like an exam that you can pass or fail, so it feels pretty normal, but of course I have a very satisfied feeling about the fact that I have completed such an extensive endeavour, and there is a lot of extra attention which makes it more emotional.

### 2) Why and how did you begin to cycle ?

Injuries that forced me to give up football and later I had problems running also. I wanted to keep practicing a sport and cycling turned out to be a logical option.

### 3) Why and how did you begin the BIG challenge ?

When I started cycling I immediately noticed that I liked cycling in hilly areas the most. When I read something about the BIG for the first time in 1999, I was immediately hooked.

### 4) Was there someone who motivated you in the beginning ?

Initially, I was self-motivated, even my friends in the local club showed little interest, but my acquaintance with others affected by the BIG virus during the Meeting in 2003 was very pleasant.

### 5) At which moment did you think : "I'll reach 1000"?

Perhaps the idea of reaching a 1000 was latent somewhere in my brain. But for a long time I thought I would end at about 950 climbs. Especially in 2014 after I had to turn around half way up the Orjen Sedlo in Montenegro because I wanted to be back before dark and a few days later when I skipped another Big because of the dangerous traffic. I never wanted to oblige myself to finish. But after cycling with other members in some special countries, I knew that finishing was achievable in an attractive way for me.

### 6) About your score evolution, were there events in your private life that increased or decreased it ?

To my surprise, my employer offered me the opportunity to take unpaid leave during the summer. I am still grateful to him for that.

### 7) What were the countries where you found more difficulties to cycle ?

I haven't had any real problems, nice people live all over the world. Some trips were of course expensive. There were bad roads or roads with too much traffic. In some areas there are no campings.

Once I was at the border of Ukraine but I had to turn around and go back home because I didn't have the right car papers to enter the country. I drove back to Ukraine soon after.

In southern Italy, Greece and Georgia I had problems with aggressive sheepdogs.

Fortunately, I have not had any problems with for example, corrupt police.

### 8) What are the most beautiful sceneries (landscapes) that you met ?

I have discovered that I like green landscapes better than more arid areas. In the Alps, the highest areas stand out with Colle de Nivolet being the most beautiful. Landscapes that differ greatly from what I am used to in Western Europe always make the greatest impression. The climbs in Wales and Ireland really appealed to me. Climbs in Chile were epic to use a modern word. New Zealand, great. Norway fantastic when the weather is good. The Azores, of which I said in 2009 that I did not like to go there, outstanding.

### 9) Did you often think : "I put my wheels where professional racers put theirs" or "where other BIG members put theirs" ?

I was always interested in professional cycling. So cycling famous climbs



was a plus. And that also applies to watching speed cycling on TV with climbs that I have done myself.

### 10) Were there a final competition or race between those at the end who were near the Grail of 1000 ?

Not for me.

### 11) What are your best souvenirs of relationships sharing in the BIG world ?

I enjoyed meeting all sorts of people with different interests than most of the people I am usually surrounded with in my village and my local cycling club. I enjoyed the meetings. And I keep a special place in my heart for the BIG members with whom I have traveled in recent years to some special countries. So thank you Ard, Heiko, Anja, Luigi and Daniel. And don't forget Helmuth, Patricia and Christiaan who live in my province and who were there for me at Gran Canaria.

But above all off course Tineke, nobody completed as many BIGs with me as she did.

### 12) What are your worst souvenirs inside the 1000 ?

Dogs in Greece really scared me.

Some roads with dangerous traffic.

Thunder, rain, storm, and cold. Strangely, I often felt satisfaction after I had braved bad weather.

### 13) The several languages used in the BIG Cycling World : is this an additional interest or a real problem for you ?

it's a plus for me.

### 14) Do you think that your kind of passion is very similar to the majority of the other members that you met ?

I do believe there is a shared interest in travel and of course an emphasis on climbing as part of cycling. Often people find the figures related to a climb very interesting, not to mention the feeling of scoring reaching a top.

### 15) Had you a good feedback inside your country when talking about the BIG ?

Of course many people, including cyclists, were hardly interested. That changed over time, as people realized that doing so many BIGs is quite special

### 16) Do you think that the national dutch challenge will give an additional interest to your fellow countrymen ?

That Dutch list is of course a bit idiotic. But if I'm in the area I'll pick them up. And I'm not the only one.

### 17) Among your 1000, what are the most difficult ones with the slopes ?

Angliru and Monte Zoncolan were tough, but two stand out: Malga

Palazzo and the Nebelhorn. Two impossible climbs and an adventure in itself.

18) What do your family and friends think about this passion for cyclo-climbing in Europe ?

They think it's wonderful what I've done,

19) Do you have any bad or sorry feelings somewhere about all these years used to build your score in BIG ?

No, but otherwise I would have had some other travelling.

20) How do you see your future in your cycling practice ?

I'll keep on going, but won't go through complete lists anymore.

21) What do you want to say to those who begin the BIG now ?

Put enjoyment first, it's not about reaching 1000 climbs, but about getting there, el camino.

22) Can you sum up BIG in one short sentence ?

It's a hobby, a virus, a bucket list!

## 10TH SUPERLIST FINISHER - WIM VAN ELS 19-04-23

Bravo Wim !

On 18 April 2023 BIG member no. 122 Wim van Els climbed his 1000th BIG of the Superlist, the Pozo de las Nieves, on the island of Gran Canaria.

He became the 8th Superlist finisher and the first Dutch national in the Netherlands to climb 1000 BIGs.

Wim is among the first members of the BIG club and has been a permanently active member and climber, declaring new BIGs every year. 2009 was a year especially rich in new conquests for Wim, in that year he climbed 172 BIGs, ex æquo with Luigi Spina. Luigi and Wim did it in different ways and decided in the end to finish the year with the same number of climbs, surely one of the most memorable events in the long Challenge BIG history! At these times it was exceptional to see members climbing so many BIGs in one year. That yearly record stood for a long time.

Wim's camping car and bikes brought him to almost all regions and corners of Europe, even to Iceland!

Only for some trips to overseas continents he had to leave the camping car behind. Wim often made individual long and short travels but also is one of the most active participants in the annual BIG meetings and crossroads. Also he is actively involved in his local cycling club and participates in road classics. Not forgetting his hiking activities

His wife Tineke often joins him and also climbs BIGs herself.

Some memorable examples:

The BIG meeting in Georgia in July 2018, in sometimes very hot weather (42C) and difficult situations (bad roads, aggressive dogs, closed borders, bad quality rental bikes) more than 10 BIGs were climbed all over the country. Especially, the Caucasus mountains were highly impressive. Interesting fact: out of the four participants, Wim is the third to reach the 1000th, after Ard and Luigi.

A 4 week roadtrip in August 2017 with Ard Oostra in Eastern Europe, especially Roumania and Bulgaria and the Balkans. A trip with many hours of cycling and driving, every day a new environment, cultural, social and culinary experience, with obviously it's amount of unexpected events....

Also special was the travel in Chile in January 2019 with Anja and Heiko. After Luigi's travels there some years before, several other BIG members discovered that this a beautiful, varied, exceptional country for climbing BIGs (for the zone South America). The Andes mountains and volcanic landscapes make it an eldorado for cyclists. Just to mention, the tunnel and Christo Redentor pass up to 3800 m altitude or the climbs in the Atacama desert up to 5000m altitude.

What is exceptional about Wim is that he has almost non stop energy and motivation to travel, bike and hike. Wim took early retirement because he wanted to concentrate his life on the cycling. He was very relieved when he got rid of a knee injury right at that period of time. During the two years of the pandemic it was not possible to make many trips abroad and finish his list but still Wim managed to cycle 15.000kms per year! In the last year 2022 Wim went to the Balkans and Greece to climb his last BIGs, all done but one! Most of previous BIG laureates would have immediately climbed their last BIG to reach 1000. Not Wim, in the summer he made first an impressive nostalgic trip over the French Alps highest cols and passes before organizing his trip to Gran Canaria.

Of all laureates so far Wim is among the strongest, fittest, most perseverant and active members.

**Text written by Heiko, Luigi & Ard, other finishers**

## Voetballer gaat wielrennen en levert een unieke prestatie



Wim van Els in het hooggebergte.

Wim van Elst (69) uit Uden vond de 12 kilometer van zijn huis naar de middelbare school vroeger erg saai. Ook toen hij naar zijn werk fietste, was dat geen hobby van hem. Later wordt hij alsnog besmet met het wielervirus en heeft hij een zeer bijzondere prestatie neergezet.

Wim werd geboren in Landhorst en voetbal was altijd zijn favoriete sport. Toen hij door blessures moest stoppen, werd hij lid van de atletiekvereniging in Uden. Maar ook daar gooiden blessures roet in het eten.

In 1992 koos hij daarom voor wielrennen. Met de plaatselijke club deed hij mee aan een klimmetje in Berg en Dal en toen werd Wim verliefd op de sport. "Het gevoel van een beklimming deed me denken aan een goede duurloop."

De daaropvolgende jaren volgden heel wat beklimmingen in binnen- en buitenland. In 1999 las Wim over de BIG. Dat is een internationaal brevet voor mensen die van beklimmingen houden. Er is een lijst met 1000 bergen die bijvoorbeeld bekend zijn van wielerscooters en die in trek zijn bij toeristen.

"Sommige bergen waren zo steil dat ik stukken moest lopen."

"Ik hield altijd al bij welke bergen ik beklom en noteerde het aantal kilometers en hoogtemeters. De BIG trok me en ik schreef me in, zonder dat ik dacht ze ooit allemaal te beklimmen."

Maar die duizendste beklimming kwam er dit jaar wel degelijk. Na afloop kreeg hij in Gran Canaria uit handen van fietsvrienden het certificaat. "Ik ben wereldwijd de tiende fietser die de lijst vol heeft en de eerste Nederlander. Er waren zelfs twee bergen die zo steil waren dat ik stukken moest lopen."

940 van de beklimmingen liggen in Europa, waarvan tien in Nederland. Er zitten bekende bergen tussen als de Alpe d'Huez en de Mont Ventoux, maar ook veel zware beklimmingen in bijvoorbeeld Oostenrijk en Italië.

"Fietsen in Chili en Nieuw-Zeeland was onvergetelijk."

Wim heeft door zijn liefde voor het fietsen vrijwel alle Europese landen bezocht. "Van Georgië en Oekraïne tot Ierland en Schotland. Ook ben ik op eilanden geweest, zoals de Azoren. De ene plek was nog mooier dan de andere. Noorwegen heeft bijvoorbeeld ongelooflijke stukken natuur."

Om de duizend beklimmingen vol te maken, mogen deelnemers op ieder continent 10 bergen zelf uitkiezen. "Ik hield altijd al van sportieve uitstapjes, maar de vakanties hebben we de afgelopen tientallen jaren helemaal afgestemd op de BIG-lijst. Zo ben ik met mijn vrouw of andere fietsers op prachtige plekken geweest. Het is moeilijk om één hoogtepunt te noemen, maar fietsen in Chili en Nieuw-Zeeland was onvergetelijk."

"Het kost erg veel tijd en geld."

Hij hoeft niet bang te zijn dat zijn vrouw er nu genoeg van heeft. "Zonder steun van het thuisfront was dit nooit gelukt. Het kost natuurlijk erg veel tijd en geld. Tineke is gelukkig ook fanatiek met de BIG-lijst bezig en heeft al ruim 280 beklimmingen op haar naam staan, de hoogst genoteerde Nederlander. We gaan samen lekker door met onze passie. Er zijn nog zoveel mooie bergen die we willen beklimmen, we kiezen de pareltjes uit. En de snelheid? Dat is bijzaak, we zijn normale fietsers."



Wim van Els tijdens een beklimming.