

Congratulations to Martin Taylor, who became the winner of the Super BIG on 5 October 2023.

1) What are your feelings reaching the arrival ?

It's funny, but to start off with it is a bit of an anticlimax - I was just focussed on getting up and down the climb in one piece. It was only later, with the assistance of a cold beer, that I was able to reflect on what I had done and only then was I filled with a real sense of achievement. Ultimately though, finishing should be no big deal because it is all about the journey. And planning the next adventure...

2) Why and how did you begin to cycle ?

Like most people, I started to cycle as a child. Growing up in Norway I skied more than I cycled, but I was the proud owner of a purple tricycle. On returning to the UK I was upgraded to a shiny, red, 5-speed racing bike and there was no looking back. I started to cycle longer distances once I got too old for lego, but was still too young for beer and girls. University and professional qualifications in London resulted in a near-cessation of all cycling activity and it was only when a) I realised I was fat and unfit and b) my employer offered me a 6 month sabbatical that I decided to get back on the bike. I bought a touring bike and a tent and cycled from Brittany in Northern France to the Pyrenees. Whilst it was a nice route overall, it was not until I reached the top of the Col de



Port near Foix (it forms the bulk of BIG 354 Col de Peguere) that I was hooked and the rest, as they say, is history.

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

had always been motivated by various cycling challenges. I used to pore over maps searching for the highest roads in each country, or looking for the climbs on the Tour de France, and then Alpine passes over 2,000m. I started to plan my touring routes to climb all these hills and it was whilst I was researching these trips that I came across an early



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

I never planned to do the 1,000. I had everything on a spreadsheet and I had calculated that 915 would be my target as I had no interest in going to certain places in the challenge (no names!). It was only after meeting some of the other Biggers that I was encouraged to go to these places and then I thought 'why not?'

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

My main issue is that I live in London! My nearest climb is a one hour cycle away and only 200m high; my nearest big is in another country; and I have to get on a plane or a ferry to go anywhere with proper mountains. London really is not a good place to cycle. When I do travel I have to fit it around work. When I was able to take time out, Bigging increased, and when I had to work, Bigging more or less stopped. I am lucky enough to be a consultant so most of the time I could be flexible and take large chunks of time off work, the only exception being 2013-2020 when I worked full time which coincides with a massive drop off in my BIG collecting. And then, of course, there was Covid...

incarnation of the BIG website. It was a veritable gold mine of information and after a few years I decided I should tally up the number of 'BIGs' I had done - surely I had done most of the them by now? In fact I had done less than 100 so this clearly piqued my interest. I moved away from touring and got more into riding sportives and so it was in preparation for the 2009 Etape du Tour (summit finish on Mont Ventoux) that I decided to incorporate a BIG-hunting trip into my training programme. I found the motivation of bagging a big added to a huge improvement in my fitness and hill-climbing ability an intoxicating combination.

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

I was always motivated (and relieved!) to see guys older than me still riding their bikes up all these hills. I particularly remember one chap 15 years my senior absolutely kicking my ass at the 2007 Etape and that motivated me to train more and harder which inevitably resulted in more BIG action.





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

Cycling difficulties can come from two sources: the natural environment; and people. The only place I have had difficulties with the latter was in Morocco, where I had stones thrown at me and the constant unwelcome attention of people trying to separate me from my money. Environmental challenges come in all shapes and sizes whether it's forgetting how to breath at 5,000m in the Himalaya, carrying 10 litres of water on your bike to make it across the Mojave Desert or looking for somewhere bear-free to camp in the Alaskan wilderness. But, ultimately, all these challenges add to the adventure and form part of the memories that one carries forward.

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

In no particular order, my favourite landscapes have been in: Norway (especially the Lofoten Islands); Swiss Alps; North West Scotland; Patagonia; Utah & Arizona USA; And, of course, pretty much anywhere in Italy!

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

I do find it motivating to think that the pros have raced up the same climb as me and I like to watch the races on television and see that even a pro can suffer like a dog. I must confess that I do not often think about other biggers that might have cycled the same

road although it is nice to do a climb that not many others have done.

10) Was this a final competition or race between those at the end who were near the Grail of 1000 ?

I have always kept an eye on other people near the top of the classification. I used to be a little higher up so I would try and keep up with Aard and Kevin but work got in the way and they pulled away. I have had a few battles to get the highest number in the year as well.

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

There are too many individual souvenirs to list, but overall the BIG world has taken me to literally hundreds of places I would not otherwise have visited. I have also met some likeminded fools who have been great company and motivated me still further.



12) What are your worst souvenirs inside the 1000 ?

I don't have any bad souvenirs really. Yes, there has been some bad weather (like the time I pushed my fully laden touring bike through the snow on Col du Parpaillon only to find the tunnel doors shut at the top), numerous mechanical failures, and some bad roads with idiot drivers, but that was all just part of the story.

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

I am a lazy English person, so lucky that almost everyone speaks my language. I can speak some French so I like to see that too. I can't comment on the Dutch...

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

It was a very pleasant surprise to meet other Biggers when I finally joined the 2015 trip to Greece. I thought you would all be strange, but in the end you were just as strange as me and it was great to finally find some likeminded cycling companions.



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

To be honest, I struggle to get people interested. Most of my friends have full time jobs and full time families and have very limited time to get away and cycle. They are also scared to come cycling with me for some reason...

Maybe now the kids are starting to leave school and go to university, who knows...?

16) Do you think that your national challenge will give you an additional interest ?

Personally I do not find the UK Natacha motivating, but that is more to do with the nature of hill cycling in the UK. There are very few climbs where you would make a special journey just to cycle a climb, so I am less inclined to chase these climbs. Also, if I have free time, I would almost always prefer to travel to Europe and ride in the higher mountains.

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

I think the Nebelhorn stands out for me. It is ridiculously steep and the only one of the 1000 where I had to push the bike a bit (don't tell anyone...). Then you have the famous climbs like Angliru and Zoncolan - I am just blown away when I watch the pros race up these slopes - it is not human. But the (unpleasant) surprise for me was the severity of many of the lesser-known Austrian climbs - Kitzbuhl, Zillertal, Rettenbach, Oschenicksee, Zirknitzal, Hochkar, Grosserspeikogel, not to mention all the shorter steep ones (I think I may have actually gone into cardiac arrest on Loferalp). I have never been so broken, so many times, by one country!

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

They think I am absolutely crazy, but give me a bit of respect too.

19) Do you have any bad or sorry feelings somewhere about all these years used to build your score in BIG ?
No!!!



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

I see myself getting back into longer distance touring. I really enjoyed my ride through Patagonia earlier this year and I have a lot of plans - Japan, Tibet, Bolivia, USA to name but a few. However, I have also enjoyed riding some of the TGVs albeit at a more leisurely pace! There are some fantastic climbs in this list, particularly in Italy. And I will always gravitate back to the Alps and the Pyrenees where a few old friends like the Toumalet need to be climbed from time to time...

Additional question : why do you choose Üçoluk as the last one ?

I am afraid that my choice of Ucoluk was purely pragmatic. I just wanted to get my last remaining Asian BIG and Antalya is the closest mountainous place with a direct flight from London. I did not even hire a car...

Vinny
(Martin Taylor)

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

Take your time and enjoy the journey. Enjoy planning the trip and enjoy doing the trip. And start planning the next one as soon as you finish.

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

Challenge, motivation, companionship, adventure memories, dreams (technically not a sentence, but you catch my drift).

