

## Paul Sherwen's Humanitarian Legacy

Paul Sherwen died unexpectedly in Kampala, Uganda on December 2, 2018. Along with his broadcast partner of over 30 years, Phil Liggett, he provided dynamic narration about the sport to millions of English speaking cycling fans worldwide. His storytelling was a gift that made racing understandable and the sport's history relatable, and he provided an invaluable contribution by nurturing the emotional hook which connected many new fans to pro cycling.

But sport was only one part of Sherwen and his life's work, and the void he leaves transcends his impact on cycling. What most of the cycling world never saw was his tireless work in the service of others – as an entrepreneur, mentor, and humanitarian. Sherwen had another and entirely separate life in his adopted homeland of Uganda – completely beyond the narrow sphere of professional cycling – where his contributions were just as great, where his legacy is just as well-established, and for which he may be remembered even longer.

Sherwen's formative years as an adolescent in Uganda (once described by Winston Churchill as the "Pearl of Africa") set the stage for his later and significant impact on the region. Sherwen's parents moved to Tororo in eastern Uganda, where his father managed an ICI fertilizer plant, when Paul was seven years old. A close associate of Paul's father, Frank Howett, was already established there. Sherwen attended a boarding school in Kaptagat, Kenya, but when on vacation he (sometimes with his sister, Jayne) frequently accompanied Howett deep into Uganda's northern Karamoja region on safari and to hunt wild game. As it turned out, these experiences in Karamoja strongly influenced the rest of Sherwen's life.

Karamoja's history is punctuated by conflict, beauty, and emerging potential. When Sherwen first visited the region in the early 1960s, Karamoja was still unspoiled bushland and its predominant tribe, the Karamojong, were a nomadic and pastoral people. The natural beauty of the land, its abundance of wildlife, and the openness of its people left a huge impression on the young Sherwen. However, the region was severely oppressed and persecuted during Idi Amin's tyranny in the 1970s and '80s; systematic destruction of communities and indiscriminate massacres decimated the population and its culture. Prolonged droughts further displaced and disrupted those who survived Amin's purges.

The nomadic clans were resettled into villages after Yoweri Museveni came to power in 1986, which created further pressure on Karamojong identity. Civil wars erupted in neighboring Rwanda, Sudan, and the Congo, and the illicit arms trade flooded Karamoja with automatic weapons. Tribal disputes were too often settled with guns instead of traditional tribal compromises, and the Ugandan army occupied the area to keep some measure of peace. The ensuing "Cattle Wars," made the region one of the most dangerous on the planet.

Sherwen began returning to Uganda as his career in cycling was ending; he wrapped up his Continental racing career in 1985, had two more successful British campaigns in '86 and '87, and left the competitive scene after the Raleigh-Banana Team, where he was the director, folded in 1989. But by the early 1990s, there were more guns than people in Karamoja, and the escalating regional conflicts led to waves of refugees migrating into other parts of Uganda – particularly the capital city of Kampala. Against this backdrop of uncertainty, Sherwen and his wife, Katherine, permanently moved back to his spiritual homeland in 1999.

"Paul had been traveling to Uganda intermittently as the situation here improved," says Katherine, "but by 1999 (President) Museveni was really turning things around and was reaching out to a lot of business and landowners who were exiled or displaced when Amin ran the country. He said to them, 'Come back home, I will help you to reclaim what you lost and start over,' and people began investing in Uganda again."

According to Katherine, many of those who decided to return were contemporaries in the Uganda that Paul had grown up in, but Uganda in 1999 lacked progress. "Although the level of development in neighboring Kenya was much higher than in Uganda because of Uganda's long-running civil unrest over the years, there was now a buzz of excitement and promise in the country as new pro-business and investment opportunities were being developed. Paul was excited to be involved in these opportunities to make a difference."

Sherwen's mindset was to bring in private investment to build industrial capacity, achieve sustainable growth, and create stable jobs. "He didn't dislike aid organizations, he just didn't feel that was the right way to bring lasting change." Added Katherine, "Paul's intention wasn't to save Africa; this was his home, this was where his heart was. His approach was self-reliance. What can we do with what we have to train people to earn a job and continue to develop skills?"

## Developing the Ugandan Economy

Cycling was the career that prepared Paul for his calling. According to his contemporaries, his Manchester-based cycling coach Harold Nelson instilled an ethos in him to get up every time you fall down – you can't finish the race if you give up – and to lead others by example. Sherwen had already seen first-hand that life in Africa could be harder than any bike race and perhaps that's one reason he worked so hard for success for himself and to mentor others.

Paul's career in broadcasting was taking off by the early 1990s. Lessons he learned as a racer and as the press officer for the Motorola team sharpened his commentary style, and his rapport with the well-established Liggett had solidified. But while he was spending a good deal of his time travelling internationally to commentate on cycling, Sherwen also saw many opportunities in Africa that others didn't. Furthermore, he understood that these opportunities needed investment and time.

Once settled in, his focus turned to Uganda's then-untapped mineral reserves, the development of which was going to require great patience, massive investment, and backbreaking labor. His childhood mentor, Frank Howett, had long owned a gold mining concession and Sherwen came in as a partner (Liggett and Lance Armstrong also invested for a time) and ran its daily operations when not in the broadcast booth. To get the mine operational, he and Frank found a derelict World War II steel ball mill in Mombasa – a huge piece of munitions manufacturing equipment – and relocated it to the mine and spent countless hours repairing it to reprocess old tailings and keep the business running.

"Paul and I became very close friends through his mining business. He often referred to me as "ndugu yangu" or my brother in English," says Joshua Tuhumwire, Uganda's former Commissioner of Mines, and who coordinated the economic development of Uganda's mineral sector. According to Tuhumwire and others, Sherwen was critical in the formation of the Uganda Chamber of Mines and became its first Chairman, which evolved into the current Chamber of Mines and Petroleum; he also served on the Presidential Investors' Round Table. Sherwen was the Chamber's General Secretary for many years, and on its Board of Trustees until his death.

When massive oil and gas reserves were discovered in western Uganda in the early 2000s, Sherwen and his partners recognized the potential, but also realized that extensive industrial and infrastructure development would also be needed. This in turn would require new education and healthcare facilities, and greater mobility for the people. All of this could be capitalized by the energy wealth under their feet, but they had to find a way to bring it to the surface and to the global market.

Jerry Burley, along with Tuhumwire, was one of Sherwen's oldest and most trusted business collaborators. While Tuhumwire was a professional geologist and political facilitator, Burley was a man who could get things done on the ground. Sherwen and Burley had bonded over their love of rugby, and

eventually formed three successful companies: Strategic Logistics Limited (SLL), East African Cranes Limited (EAC) and Specialised Welding Services Limited (SWS).

According to Burley, the Logistics arm laid down one kilometer of road per day, through some of the most challenging and isolated terrain, to a standard required for 100-ton transport trucks *and* meet very tough UK-level environmental and safety requirements. The roadworks made a huge impact on Uganda's economic landscape, further opening up the Western half of the country to commercial exchange and transportation, and creating the capacity to responsibly recover mineral and petroleum wealth on which the country could accelerate modernization efforts.

## Developing the Ugandan People

Underscoring Katherine's comments, Burley said, "Our businesses illustrate one of Paul's most important legacies – his belief in the need for Africa to become self-sustaining in terms of its workforce and institutional capacity. These were commercial entities designed to make a profit and all three were groundbreaking in East Africa in different ways. We believed that commercially-driven training can be the most effective path to self-reliance."

Pat Montani, a Canadian businessman and the founder of the grassroots [Bicycles For Humanity](#) movement, first met Sherwen in 2006 and the two entrepreneurs formed a strong personal friendship. "A mutual friend named Steve Jennings introduced Paul and I at my first Tour of California, back when I was starting Bicycles for Humanity," recalls Montani. "I told Paul I was on my way to Namibia with a container of bikes and he suggested I see him in Uganda."

"We jumped in his Land Cruiser and proceeded into the bush, where he shared every piece of history, culture and wildlife about Uganda," continued Montani. "He spoke multiple African languages, we met chiefs and elders, and he taught me how Africa works." Sherwen and Montani agreed that non-governmental aid organizations (NGOs) were not as effective as they could be in Uganda, and they shared a philosophy of empowerment and self-sufficiency over hand-outs and short-term aid.

A disarmament campaign in Karamoja in the early and mid 2000s had improved the situation; the government began some development projects and NGOs were bringing in aid to the region. "He never forgot his roots," said Montani. "When the Cattle Wars were ending and everyone was afraid to go there, he decided that we should send 5,000 bicycles, provide bike mechanic and business training, so that as the Karamojans settled into camps, we could provide mobility and to help them build a better life."

According to Montani, Phil Liggett was also a big booster for this project. "When away from work on TV, we rarely talked about cycling, but always about Africa and our lives there," said Liggett of Sherwen's love for Uganda (Liggett maintains a residence in the Grietjie Private Nature reserve, part of Kruger National Park in South Africa). "He constantly told me about his plans for the Karamoja people, but I never had the time to become very involved. We did however, work together at his fund-raising occasions for Bicycles for Humanity. Here we raised money for containers to be shipped to Uganda full of bikes in any condition, to provide better mobility for the people and to help students get to school quicker."

## Conserving Uganda's Environment

Sherwen's outlook for Uganda was holistic – incorporating its economy, its people, and its environment. Anne-Marie Weeden, the former General Manager of the Uganda Conservation Foundation (UCF), said "Paul inherently understood the connections between communities and wildlife, and how you cannot protect the latter without engaging and empowering the former."

According to Michael Keigwin, currently with the UCF, Sherwen was instrumental in preserving the

famous Murchison Falls National Park at a time when it was under severe pressure from poachers. “Paul and his team provided their full support.” Sherwen provided heavy machinery to build roads, clear sites for ranger stations, and convert shipping containers into makeshift Ranger Posts. “It was a hell of an effort to recover Murchison Falls,” added Keigwin, “but there is no way we could have done it without Paul and his commitment to Uganda.”

Sherwen knew how to effectively use his celebrity as an international bike racing commentator to raise awareness of the beauty of Uganda, its people and its rich biodiversity, and he often mobilized his extensive network of business and cycling contacts into taking action. Weeden recalls a conservation infrastructure project that was handed over to the Uganda Wildlife Authority. “There was a very formal event, with top brass officials and the British High Commissioner in attendance.” Sherwen recognized the value of having his colleague, Lt. General Ivan Koreta, take the limelight to the delight of the rangers, who all knew Koreta by his military reputation. Everyone, including Paul, stood in reverence when Koreta spoke.

Added Weeden, “Paul knew when to wield his celebrity and when to be anonymous; he had the humility to know when it would add value, and when it wouldn’t. Most of the photos of Paul from that day are of him goofing around with the rank and file rangers. That day, he was one of the team, and not some international celebrity. I suspect this is something he enjoyed about Uganda; once he was out of Kampala where most people didn’t have the faintest idea of his ‘other life,’ he was accepted at face value. I can imagine these sort of ordinary interactions were extremely important to him.”

## Building Trust

Doing business in Central and Eastern African can frequently only be done once you have the approval of elders and local leaders. Sherwen’s humility and ability to connect with people was a gift, and he understood the importance of community involvement in preserving the culture and the environment. The time and care Sherwen invested to build the relationships for a stronger Uganda earned him a base of friends and respect from tribal leaders, children in the bush, and all the way to President Museveni. “One night in Kampala, Paul received a call and handed me the phone,” said Montani, “and the First Lady was on it, asking us to help in Karamoja.”

One of the most important skills Sherwen honed was language. He could converse in several European Continental languages, but had mastered Swahili and a few words of its related dialects at a young age and took great joy in ‘shooting the breeze’ with the locals wherever he traveled in Africa. “Even just a few words in a language they shared,” said Katherine of Paul’s communication style, “and the walls would come down.” Liggett recalls one such episode *outside* of Africa. “I remember a Nigerian waitress at Heathrow airport upon hearing him speak Swahili retort: ‘No white man can speak Swahili like that.’ Paul replied: ‘I can.’ He was Africa through and through and loved the people.”

Elly Karuhanga, the current chairman of Uganda’s Chamber of Mines and Petroleum, described the time when Sherwen accompanied President Museveni on a visit the gold mine. Museveni and Sherwen traveled together in a presidential limo and conversed in Swahili during the entire trip. “(Paul) never forgot such a thrilling moment, and the Swahili conversation they had,” Karuhanga shared in his eulogy of Sherwen. “He said ‘the guy is very clever and very wise, but we had company. It wasn’t just two of us, he had an AK-47 in the backseat separating me and him.’ We always had an inside joke with each other. Every time he told me I was clever and wise, I’d tell him it was because of my AK-47 (‘rwita bagomi’). And we would roll out in laughter. He would reply in Swahili, ‘wewe mushenzi kabisa’ (you are such a complete idiot).”

Montani shared perhaps an even more memorable moment in which Sherwen revealed his character. “We were in the market district, and wherever you park your car someone will come to you and offer to

watch your car for a few coins, to make sure nothing happens to it while you're gone. There was a young man on a kind of dolly cart, like the kind you use to get under your car, and he was pulling himself around because he had no legs, a victim of war. Paul spoke to the young man in his language, asked him for his name and really tried to make that personal connection. Later when we came back, the young man was still there and Paul generously thanked him for doing such a good job, tipped him a few more shillings, and wished him well, and you could see the effect it had, the young man's eyes just lit up with hope and gratitude."

"That was Paul," added Montani, "He truly believed everyone has a value and a potential if you could encourage it."

## Empowering Africans

Building self-reliance was at the core of Sherwen's long view for his country. Sherwen took immense pride that his companies had produced the best certified welders in all of Africa. "These were the first-ever East and Central African 6G 'coded' welders, the toughest qualification there is in welding, witnessed, tested and awarded by Lloyds of London," said Burley of their employees.

Creating this professional capacity required about U.S. \$1 Million in training and equipment costs, and in total these three companies trained, empowered and certified approximately 250 local people in other practical trade skills. Many are capable of training and teaching countless others in these trades.

"My memories of Paul at the SWS launch, with me and Joshua, were I think some of his proudest in terms of helping local people develop – most of those we trained are now working for themselves as most Ugandans want to, and doing very well," said Burley.

The wide scope of projects and campaigns Sherwen promoted in Uganda always led back to his spiritual home of Karamoja, and all of those who contributed insights for this article noted Sherwen's unwavering focus on making Karamoja a better place. Sherwen lobbied the government to pay more attention to its development, and for tourism to expose more people to the area. He wanted to help the Karamojong to develop themselves and escape the poverty trap, and according to Karuhanga, Sherwen "brought dignity to the Karamajong."

Sherwen saw mobility – particularly bicycles – as a key for success. The Karamojong may have lost their traditional way of life by settling into fixed communities, but bicycles have proven effective in improving the situation. Bicycle mobility drives commerce and connects communities. Dovetailing off of several successful Bicycles For Humanity efforts in the area, Sherwen also helped to open a safari lodge with the local people, founded a mountain bike park and travel center, started a technical and business skills education center (renamed the 'Paul Sherwen Centre for Excellence'), and helped create the first [Tour of Karamoja](#) (along with [Kara-Tunga Arts Center's](#) current Director, Theo Vos) – which in 2018 was the largest cycling event in Ugandan history.

## An Enduring Legacy

Many in the cycling world will wonder how Sherwen found the time and energy to do so many other things, and to make so many contributions to his adopted home. But there is no doubt that Sherwen was much more than just one of cycling's most popular broadcast personalities; not just the former competitor and British professional national champion; more than one of the most respected riders of his generation for his die-hard toughness, his indefatigably upbeat morale and his mentoring of young riders. Sherwen's name will be as fondly remembered in Uganda and his legacy is firmly affixed in both spheres.

While pro cycling will continue forward in different directions, with new voices to share the stories, the

communities Sherwen helped to develop and support in Uganda will be telling stories about him for years to come. His companies laid foundations for economic and human development on a wide scale, and his attention to the country's people, resources, and environment has helped spark new investment and renewed focus on Uganda as a destination for business and tourism.

As instilled by his first coach, Nelson, Sherwen sought to lead by example, and show others that he could work just as hard as anyone. According to his former employees and partners, Sherwen regularly pulled 12 hour shifts at the gold mine, literally in the shafts to pull up buckets of ore, because it built a mutual trust and inspired his employees to work just as hard for success. Later, during UCI Pro and WorldTour seasons in which Liggett and Sherwen would be in a remote broadcast booth (in Connecticut), Sherwen would fly to the U.S. from Kampala, do the commentary, and then fly back home and drive many hours to the mine to pull his weight and help manage the operation, week after week, often for six months on end.

Arguably, Sherwen's service to Uganda, business interests, and broadcasting career wore him down a bit in recent years. While he privately admitted fatigue only to his closest friends at times, his stamina and laser-sharp focus also seemed superhuman to everyone else around him. Sherwen sometimes joked with friends, "It's just a touch of Malaria, I'll be okay in a day."

Tuhumwire shared how Paul had saved his life in the wake of two cardiac attacks in 2012. There are very few specialist clinics in East Africa, and Tuhumwire needed to get urgent treatment – in India. Sherwen provided immediate assistance to have Tuhumwire seen in New Delhi, where a severe pulmonary artery blockage was treated. "It should have been Paul to eulogize me and it would have been most fitting, but it's very sad that it is me to eulogize him," said Tuhumwire at Sherwen's funeral in Kampala, adding, "he saved my life but I wasn't able to save his!"

The political landscape in Uganda is evolving as Museveni's presidency enters its 33rd year, and many of the petroleum and mining projects have temporarily stalled. But Sherwen's business and humanitarian partners all emphasized that projects in Africa take time, focus and absolute attention to make them succeed. "What he started off in Karamoja – both the safari and cycling adventures side of things, especially the human mobility Bicycles for Humanity ventures – needs to be continued, using his name, history and affinity with the place to continue to support its development. Through this continuation he couldn't have left a better legacy and it's a travesty that he died before this dream really began to bear fruit and gain full traction," said Burley.

"In many ways Paul's biggest legacy was how he encouraged those around him to follow their dreams and do the best they could," said Keigwin. Tuhumwire has spoken of forming a foundation in his honor and memory. "Through the Paul Sherwen Foundation, we shall be able to move forward his dreams and empower Africans and in particular the Karamajong, a people he so loved."

"I was lucky enough to learn the ways of Africa from a person who cared deeply for the people and his home country. Paul's attention to detail, to respecting and honoring the traditions of the people, to creating programs that the people could carry forward and grow, allowing change and opportunity to come from within, honestly might be his greatest legacy," added Montani.

"Paul had tremendous energy, and a lot of interests," says Katherine, "and he was always in the present; maybe that came from growing up in the bush. Some people have it, others learn it, but it was forged into Paul. He was aware of everything around him at all times, and he could recall almost everything. And he never forgot Karamoja," she adds. "Our family is very mindful of Paul's programs. Karamoja is a genuine endeavor and we want to continue supporting the work being done there with the good people Paul has partnered with. There will be time to figure out what that means. We won't move too fast, it must be sustainable and accountable. I believe Paul would have wanted that."

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Joe Harris, *The Outer Line*, January 30, 2018