

ARTHUR The dog who crossed the jungle to find a home

Introduction

If you had been surfing the internet in the winter of 2014 you would have surely seen the story of Arthur, the stray dog who befriended a team of adventure racers in the Ecuador jungle.

Arthur is now happily part of Mikael Lindnord's family and living a safe and contented life in Sweden but the story of how they met, their incredible journey together through the jungle and Mikael's subsequent struggle to get Arthur to Sweden makes compelling reading.

Story

Mikael and his three team mates were part way through an extreme sports race, the Adventure Racing World Championships in Brazil, one of the hardest races in the world, a 435 mile competition that includes trekking, climbing, abseiling, biking and kayaking all through harsh terrain and jungle, crossing mountains and rivers, when he spots a muddy, battered-looking dog. The team had just stopped at a transition area to have a short rest and a much-needed meal including some meat balls. Mikael noticed the dog because he was standing perfectly still despite the frenzy of people rushing around unpacking and packing their gear. There was something different about this dog, Mikael thought; he had a quiet dignity and presence about him that he had never seen in a dog. It is this regal quality that later prompts Mikael to name him Arthur after the legend of King Arthur.

The dog kept looking at Mikael unblinkingly and it was only then that he noticed that some of the mud on his coat was blood and that he had big wounds on his back. Feeling that the dog was obviously in a bad way Mikael decided to give him some of his meat balls. Coming closer he could see that a lot of the mud was in fact dried blood, he had wounds all over him, ears that were in a bad way and he had a smell that was not good. Mikael remembered that Arthur wolfed down the food in one go.

They began the next part of the race in the dark so it was a while before they realized that the dog had followed them. Arthur was determined to go with them and not be left behind. Despite an extremely strenuous hike through knee-high mud slides and dense jungle, a 36-mile kayak ride, illness and fatigue Arthur kept with them until the finishing line.

Make or Break

My favourite part of the book is where Mikael describes the internal struggle he goes through when reason tells him he must leave the dog behind but knowing that Arthur had put all his hopes for survival on him, his heart won't let him. The next part of the race involves 14 hours of kayaking through mangrove swamps and low lying water. One of his team is injured and the organizers advise them not to take Arthur with them on the boat as it would be unsafe in the water. He knew Arthur

was not a good swimmer and with his wounds and the freezing water it would be impossible for him to come with them unless they took him in the boat. Mikael's mind is in turmoil. He knows it is dangerous to take Arthur with them and could damage his team's hopes to win the race yet he feels he is contemplating the greatest betrayal of his life. How could he just leave him there in the middle of the jungle? Arthur is restless, whimpering and whining on the bank as if he can sense what is going to happen. The team have to go. Entering the icy water in the dark in two kayaks, Mikael cannot look behind him yet he is willing Arthur to jump into the water. Then he hears a splash, he knows it is Arthur but has to keep paddling to keep up with the other kayak. Arthur swims as fast as he can, his big head just above the water line but cannot catch them up and begins to drift further behind. It is at this point that Mikael knows he has to make the decision. "If you do this, it's for good," he says to himself. He stops paddling, waits for Arthur and pulls him, freezing and exhausted into his kayak.

Big News

Mikael's wife back in Sweden had put news of the team and Arthur on Facebook so when the five of them reached the finishing line plenty of people already knew about Arthur. But the race was only one part of the struggle. Getting Arthur out of Ecuador and into Sweden in just a few days was another big challenge. Fortunately, the huge amount of media exposure that the story attracted helps Mikael to persuade the authorities, and to raise money for the trip and four months quarantine in Sweden. On top of all this Arthur has to endure extensive surgery on his wounds which have parasites crawling inside them one as big as Mikael's thumb, bad teeth which require a specialist vet and a lot of media attention after the surgery, until he is finally reunited with Mikael and his young family in Sweden.

Mikael said of Arthur, "He is a fighter like me and never gives up." Indeed, this is an epic story of real love, hope and incredible endurance which this book review can only give a sense of.

As far as the writing of the book, I personally would have preferred more of the story after Mikael and Arthur meet and less about the race prior to their meeting.

The Arthur Foundation

Arthur's rescue was not the only good outcome of this story. Mikael has now established the Arthur Foundation set up to help other dogs like Arthur. In Ecuador most of the dogs are strays. They roam the streets in huge numbers surviving mostly on rubbish. There is no legislation at present to protect animals in South America. There is very little respect for animals and dogs are frequently kicked, shouted at and beaten by the local people mostly due to ignorance.

Mikael wants his foundation to help implement long and short term changes by supporting the setting up of rescue centers so that adoptions and sterilization campaigns can be carried out and also to support the campaigning for the immediate adoption of the Law on Animal Welfare.