



ELITE RACE TEAM



SALOMON WARTRAIL

60KM MOUNTAIN RUN, 135KM MOUNTAIN BIKE, 60KM RIVER paddle

Stage 1 - 60km Skyrun:

Saturday - 04h00 **START** in the dark at Lady Grey, from the Mountain View Country Inn and ending at Balloch via the Witteberge / Drakensberg mountain ridge-line, following the Herschel border fence

Stage 2 - 135km mountain bike:

Sunday - Mnt bike through Wartrail, over Lundean's Nek, down the Telle River on the Lesotho Border. Turning at the Telle Junction turn off, through Sterkspruit to Herschel then follow the road passing the Witteberge Mission station and birth place of Olive Schreiner, to Mdlokovana and the Orange River.

Phase 3 – 60km Orange River paddle:

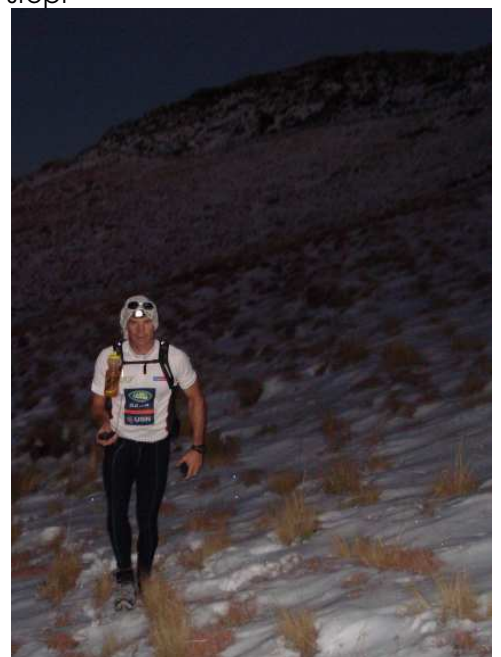
Monday – Paddle from Mdlokovana to Aliwal North. Taking out at the Riverside Lodge under the Hertzog Bridge.

All forty one competitors listened astutely as Race organizer, Adrian Saffey went through the race logistics and pitfalls. "Don't skimp on the mandatory gear", he warned "I'm not going to check anyone, but realize you are going to be extremely exposed to the elements up at 2700m, there is a lot of snow up there. Remember, the winning time on the run alone is over 10 hours."

What an incredible winter arctic experience it was. This event ranks up in the top three of all adventure races that I have ever done. Maybe, because it's the first adventure race I have done solo and the experience was surreal. The scenery on the mountain run was breathtaking. The snow made it very physical, covering the rugged terrain with a deceptive white cotton wool layer. Having to lift your feet a lot higher than normal, and you had no idea what stability your foot would encounter on every step.

After the first hour, five athletes made up the front pack. Having left the sleepy village of Lady Grey far below, we now started the 9hr traverse along the ridgeline of the Witteberge, never dropping below 2200m. Just before the second checkpoint at Olympus, I managed to slowly forge my way into the lead, just ahead of Nicolas Mulder. Close behind was Ugene Nel, Andre Gie and the first lady – Jeannie Bomford. Now that I was up in front, the Etrex Garmin GPS, Adrian Saffey gave me the night before, became my entire focus. Allowing me to confidently navigate my way in uncharted territory. Heading towards the fifth and last checkpoint, the highlight of the entire run, was running along the rocky ridge only as wide as a jeep track, aptly named the Dragons Back, with 360' views of nothing and everything. Thereafter we descended down to Balloch which was the finish and camp for the night. Local, Margi Frost's potjie and cooksisters were the perfect meal, tasty and packed with calories.

Waking up in the dark, it was too cold to think, I was thankful for getting everything ready the night before. The early start on the bike made for frozen toes and fingers.



Only after the climb up Lundeans Nek, did things start to warm up. Four of us snaked our way down the endless switchbacks towards the first checkpoint at Telle-Junction. Towards the end of the ride, we were blessed with an incredible snow rainbow to our left, so close to the road. If only I had time, that pot of gold would have been easy to find, I was tempted. I crossed the finish alongside Jeannie. She has the amazing ability to get stronger, the longer you're out there. Now the challenge was on against the guys.

The cold got to us the night before, so a few of us scampered back to Lady Grey, to stay in the Mountain View Country Inn. We fed on rump steak, chips and veg, washed down with a few glasses of red wine.

The minus four degree early morning start resulted in Andre's diesel bakkie's fuel line being frozen. After trying to push start it, we left it in the middle of the main road, as now there was no time left but to squash into the other cars and head to the start.

The paddle was halved in distance as the river was extremely low. Never have I seen ice on the banks of a river in SA. Whilst paddling I had Stalactites hanging off my peak, where the water dripping, had frozen. The gorge section was extremely beautiful, not one road or farmers pump staining the scenery. For me this was the easiest part of the race, sitting in my kayak I felt very at home.

To sum up the this incredible race, one word comes to mind – "Eish"
Thanks to Adrian Saffey, the marshals and volunteers for making it possible.

- 1st – Martin Dreyer - Land Rover Gear / USN Elite Race Team
- 2nd – Nicholas Mulder - Team Cynosis
- 3rd – Jeannie Bomford - Land Rover Gear / USn Race Team

Salomon Wartrail Tri Challenge is dedicated to people affected by HIV / Aids in the Ukhahlamba district.

