

DO IT NOW

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COMPETITION P. 92

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On the Cover - Jumping into Paradise
Photo by - Sica De St Jeor

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PUBLISHER DO IT NOW CC

DISTRIBUTION (Subscription) The Tree House - 011 315 3559

DISTRIBUTION (Retail) On the Dot - 011 401 5872

PRINTING Paarl Media - 021 870 3627



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DO IT NOW (ISSN 2074-6117) is published monthly.

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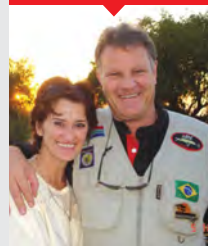
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It's that time of year again when you dust off the Christmas decorations, prepare for the festive season, and, if you're lucky enough, head towards your favourite holiday destination for some well-deserved R&R. December is a time of sharing quality time with family and friends, and giving and receiving gifts.

December is also a very special and hugely exciting month for DO IT NOW Magazine, and in more ways than one! It gives me great pleasure to announce that the magazine will now be available monthly, in both print and digital formats. The increased frequency means that our readers will enjoy more articles, current news, and feedback reports, and won't have to wait two months to get their hands on it. Although the number of pages in the print magazine will decrease to 100, it will still retain the same quality look, feel, and flow.

To further enrich your reading pleasure, we've launched a DO IT NOW Magazine Digital Application for smartphone and tablet devices. Currently, the app is only available on Apple products, but there will be many more options available in the new year. Our vision is to grow and develop a 360-degree, multi-platform approach where content will extend beyond print into digital and mobile to truly engage our readers. And in a world where quick, easy and convenient are key, this app format delivers the goods in abundance.

The application is interactive with videos and allows for a greater number of pictures to be embedded into the magazine. Links and email addresses will be 'live', and when clicked on take you directly to the selected websites or advertised products. There's also a fantastic search facility so information can be accessed quickly and easily, which speaks to today's lifestyle. A click of a button or touch is all it takes!

As mentioned earlier, Christmas is a time of giving and we are giving away 5,000 December issue downloads for FREE as part of our Festive Season Promotion! Simply download the 'DO IT NOW Magazine' application, also free, from the Apple iTunes Store. Then download your interactive issue! Terms & Conditions apply.

I hope you enjoy the new 'gifts' and may you have a very blessed and merry Christmas and New Year. The team is looking forward to continuing this exciting journey with you in 2013!

DIN regards,

Francois



dinLIST

CALENDAR

DECEMBER 2012

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SCAN US

Here are some fantastic activities and events to look out for this month:

- Multi Sport // BSG Energade Tri Series - Vanderbijlpark (Gauteng): 2 Dec
- Food & Wine // Carols on The Square - Sandton (Gauteng): 2 Dec
- Caving // Congo Caves (Oudtshoorn)
- MTB // Namakwa Festival - Springbok (NC): 2 Dec
- River Boat Cruise // Colchester (EC)
- Rowing // SA Schools Boat Race - Port Alfred (EC): 6-8 Dec
- Festival // Malmesbury Christmas Light Festival - Malmesbury (WC): 7 Dec
- Trail Run // First Ascent Trail Run - Muizenberg (WC): 8 Dec
- Paragliding // Lions Head (WC)
- Music Festival // Ballito Prawn & Jazz Festival - Ballito (KZN): 14-16 Dec
- Horse Riding // Dullstroom (Mpumalanga)
- Fair // Stilbaai Arts & Craft Fair - Stilbaai (Garden Route): 17-19 Dec

For a more comprehensive list of events and activities taking place throughout the year, check out our Calendar on our website, www.doitnow.co.za.

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MORE ISSUES



MORE ACTION



MORE INFO



LESS PAGES

PAGES FROM DECEMBER

APPLICATION LAUNCH

#2

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?



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VIDEOS

SLIDING PAGES

ACTIVE LINKS

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#1



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(Samsung, Blackberry and more are coming soon in 2013)

#2



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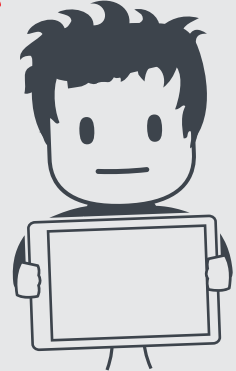
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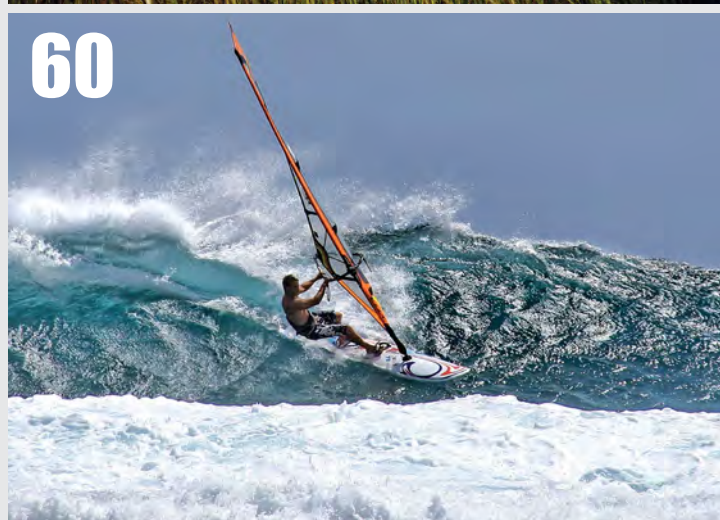
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Our fantastic new adventure has started. Heading for the Kunene.

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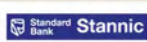


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JUMP ING INTO PARA DISE

INTO THE OCEAN YE SAIL, PAST CAPTAIN HOOK'S SECRET BAY OF SIRENS AND THE MYSTICAL BLUE CAVES TO A COVE OF SMUGGLERS WHAT CANNOT BE FOUND EXCEPT BY THOSE WHO ALREADY KNOWS WHERE IT IS. GUARDED BY TOWERING CLIFFS OF SANDSTONE AND ENVIED BY ONLOOKERS WHO CAN SEE ITS TANTALISING BEAUTY FROM AFAR YET NOT BUT STAND AT THE DIZZYING PRECIPICE AND GAPE WITH THE AWE AND DESIRE OF A THOUSAND BOOTY SEEKERS. HERE LIES THE SHIPWRECK AND ITS UNIMAGINABLE TREASURES.

That's quite a voyage, right sailor? Well, there is one other way into this infamous cove. If you're a BASE jumper you don't need to worry about commandeering that treasure map from Captain Blackeye. Rather buckle up your parachute and enter this secret cove the fast way, which is by freefall!

And so it was in August 2012 that a band of unruly misfits descended (quite literally) on Navagio (meaning shipwreck) Beach, on Zakynthos Island, in Greece. Nestled in a secluded bay surrounded by sandstone cliffs, this beach has earned itself a number of nicknames; that of the Shipwreck Beach, The Navagio, or Smugglers Cove. As the tale goes, sometime in 1981 Greek Navy ships were tipped off that the Patagiotis, a freightliner, was in the waters around Zakynthos Island and smuggling contraband, including cigarettes, wine and white meat (women). Pursuit was initiated, but stormy weather made for difficult navigation and bad visibility, resulting in the alleged smugglers running aground on Navagio Beach. The ship was abandoned and still rests buried in the beach's white sand. ▶



Amy Shaw, by Sica De St Jeor



**JUMP
ING
INTO
PARA
DISE**

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:

1. Jumper Amy Shaw doing a front loop pike 2. Jumpers Brandon Chance and Robert Moschella. Photos by Bryan Rapoza

Due to the 200 m sheer limestone cliffs protecting Smugglers Cove it is usually only accessible by boat, with daily tours bringing in tourists from nearby Porto Vromi and Port Nicholas to lounge on this small and isolated, yet strikingly beautiful sandy cove that is defined by white sand beaches and clear blue water. But for one week during August, I was lucky enough to be part of a group of 37 experienced BASE jumpers from around the world who were invited by Go Fast Energy to celebrate life by leaping from the rocks surrounding the cove and free-falling for up to six seconds before deploying our parachutes to land safely on the beach in front of enthralled onlookers. The occasion was the 2012 Go Fast BASE Jump Invitational.

LOCAL BOAT OPERATORS CAME ONBOARD FOR THE EVENT, PROVIDING ONE-WAY TRANSPORT OUT OF THE COVE FOR JUMPERS TO REPACK OUR PARACHUTES AFTER EACH JUMP, BEFORE HEADING BACK UP TO THE TOP FOR MORE!

The cliffs around the bay that we were jumping from are what jumpers call 'sub terminal' because their relatively-low height dictates a short free-fall that doesn't allow jumpers to accelerate to terminal velocity before deploying their parachutes.

On bigger jumps, when jumpers start to reach terminal velocity, the high airspeed gives them a certain amount of aerodynamic control to 'fly' away from the cliff, like a glider, and open their parachute a safer distance from the obstacle. However, the trajectory of a lower jump

like this is based entirely on momentum, like a high board diver, so one must utilise experience and a keen spatial awareness to exit the rock in such a way as to reach the desired body position at the time of deployment, and ensure a safe extraction of the parachute (referred to as a 'canopy'). Canopy extraction when one is upside down is considered a bad thing for one's health.

The packing method of the canopy is modified depending on the height of the object jumped from. In this case we packed them so that they would open very quickly and accurately away from the rock. Strict event safety precautions were part of the package agreed upon with the local Greek authorities, and the Go Fast team had ropes and rescuers on hand to rappel down should anything go wrong. Of the more than 350 jumps made over the course of the week, only one incident occurred whereby a jumper's parachute opened in line-twists, which prevented him from steering away from the rock and he became ensnared approximately 12 metres above the ground. The rescue team stepped up to the occasion in magnificent style and had him safely off the wall in no time, and jumping resumed within 15 minutes; proving that there is a responsible way to practise adrenaline sports.

The motley crew of eccentric jumpers were all housed together in the nearby Blue Beach Hotel, which provided warm hospitality to the mischievous bunch. Thankfully Greece has an open mind towards public nudity, spearguns in the swimming pool, and large-scale aerosol fires, because a group of adrenalin enthusiasts certainly do!

As a nomadic BASE jumper, I have spent the better part of the last two years chasing mountains across the interior parts of the world in search of the best jumping sites. But the unique combination of a relaxing seaside paradise and adrenalin-fuelled BASE jumping truly made me feel as if I had stepped onto the shores of Never-Never Land. ▶

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FROM TOP TO BOTTOM:

1. Amy Shaw, by Sica De St Jeor 2. The island from for up high, by Sica De St Jeor 3. Jumper Jimmy Pouchert doing a single gainer, by Bryan Rapoza 4. Wreck from up high, by Bryan Rapoza 5. Amy Shaw, by Sica De St Jeor

In-between jumps, the glittering blue waters of the Mediterranean and the island's famous 'Blue Caves' provided hours of snorkelling and scuba diving amongst the exquisite sandstone caves, many of which are entirely submerged. Free diving through underwater entrances to emerge in twinkling caverns, one might be forgiven for believing they had stumbled across the hiding place of stolen pirate treasure, or the lair of mythical sirens. Indeed, as the week came to a close, I would have happily been lured by such a mythical creature to remain in this Never-Never Land forever.

BASE JUMPING IS MANY THINGS TO MANY PEOPLE; A DARE-DEVIL STUNT, YOUTUBE SENSATION-SEEKING OR AN INTENSE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-MASTERY. IT IS A CONGREGATION OF PEOPLE FROM EVERY WALK OF LIFE; DOCTORS AND OIL RIGGERS COMING TOGETHER IN A DIVERSE TRAVELLING COMMUNITY THAT IS UNIFIED BY A COMMON APPRECIATION FOR LIFE IN ALL ITS INTENSITY.

Some people look at us and wonder why we do it. Perhaps to them we are the lost boys of Never-Never Land. But as I look around the paradise this lifestyle has led me to - good food, warm breezes and even warmer people - I can't help but wonder, with no shortage of happy thoughts, how can one do anything but fly? •

Related articles:

- Magnificence on the Far Side of Fear (Issue 17, p. 48)
- Thailand Express 400, Part 1 (Issue 17, p. 52)
- Tunnel Time! (Issue 16, p. 42)

dinFO box

GET INTO BASE JUMPING

BASE jumping is an extremely dangerous sport and thus there is no fast way to learn. For safety reasons, one must first be an experienced skydiver before attempting to BASE jump. Visit www.para.co.za for listings of various drop zones around SA. They will train you through the various stages to obtain your skydiving licence. Once licensed, you need to obtain a minimum of 200-500 skydives and reach a competent skill level, particularly in canopy control. When you are ready, find a mentor, who is an experienced BASE jumper, to guide you through the learning stages of the sport.

First BASE jumps are usually done off safer objects like bridges, before progressing to more challenging objects like antennas, buildings and cliffs. Progression is an ongoing process of many years and, due to the high risk nature of BASE, requires total commitment to every stage of the journey.

TIPS FOR SAFE BASE JUMPING

- Know your own limits.
- Do not be influenced by the decisions of others.
- And be patient, the way to becoming the best BASE jumper is to live the longest!

MORE ON BASE JUMPING

For more information on BASE jumping, have a look at the following sites:

www.chickonthewing.wordpress.com,
www.apexbase.com, www.basedreams.com,
 and www.gofastsports.com

BASE JUMPER'S FORUM

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VOODOO 8-WAY TEAM

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EMPURIABRAVA SKYDIVING CENTRE, SPAIN

Empuriabrava is the largest skydiving centre in Europe. It operates two aircraft every day and brings in additional planes for events. The facilities are great with large packing and dirt diving areas, team rooms for analysing video footage and debriefings, and easy access to world-class coaches. We chose Empuriabrava for our training camp for several reasons. Firstly, the centre operates a Twin Otter aircraft, which is the same type of plane being used for the Skydiving World Championships in Dubai. Secondly, the weather conditions are usually good for skydiving so it's possible to do as many jumps as you like. Thirdly, for its logistics. And lastly, its social appeal. This drop zone has been a favourite destination for South African skydivers for many years, so we know where to stay, eat and buy food, and it also helps having a good network of friends there. ▶

AFTER WINNING THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONALS IN APRIL THIS YEAR, THE VODOO 8-WAY TEAM DECIDED IT WOULD BE FUN TO COMPETE AT THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS TAKING PLACE IN DUBAI, IN NOVEMBER.

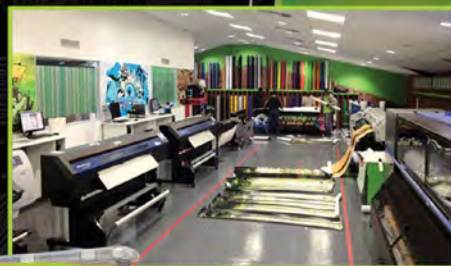
The team, consisting of Dave Sumter, Colin Rothman, Dennis Parker, Brett Shaw, Emile van den Berg, Bailey Edmunds, Paul Leslie Smith, and myself, with Erik Vliegenthart on camera, has approximately 30,000 jumps and 160 years of combined skydiving experience. Six members of the team were in the Voodoo Project 8-way team that went to the World Championships in France, in 2008, so we had a great base to work from. In preparation for the big event, we arranged a week of jumping training in Spain, in September.

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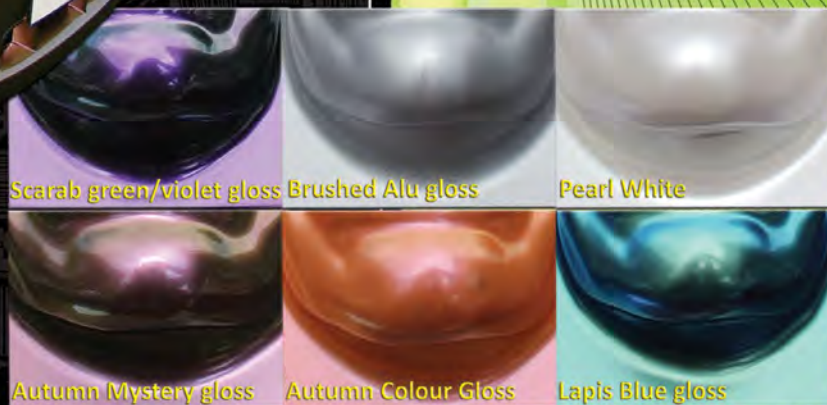


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TEAM DYNAMICS

As Colin was unable to attend the 8-way camp due to work commitments, we asked Ivan Coufal to fill his slot in the team. Ivan grew up in South Africa and started skydiving here. He then moved to Spain in his twenties and became part owner of Empuriabrava Skydiving Centre. His is a real skydiving success story!

We travelled to Spain with two parachute harnesses each, so that we could do 'back to back' loads in the plane. This means you can board the plane as soon as it lands, rather than waiting for the parachute to be repacked. Travelling with skydiving equipment is always nerve-racking as most airlines do not allow you to take it on as hand luggage, and there is always the risk that it does not arrive. Bailey experienced this firsthand as his luggage was delayed in Dubai, so he spent the first day jumping with a borrowed jumpsuit and parachute.

COACHING

Pete Allum helped us with coaching for the camp. Although he is a specialised 4-way coach he was able to help us out with the engineering of the jumps and general team coordination. With 8-way skydives there are always a few different ways that you can plan each jump. The problem comes in when all eight members of the team contribute to that planning - which can take hours.

A COACH TAKES OVER ALL OF THIS PLANNING AND IS ABLE TO CLEARLY SEE THE BEST ANGLES FOR THE FORMATION BUILDS. 'HERDING CATS' IS THE DESCRIPTION THAT COMES TO MIND WHEN TRYING TO ORGANISE EIGHT SKYDIVERS. PETE WOULD HAVE A PLAN FOR THE DAY AND GIVE EVERYONE TIMINGS OF WHEN TO BE THERE AND WHAT HE OR SHE NEEDED TO DO.

The most visible improvement Pete helped us with was the 'exits' from the plane. The Twin Otter has a big door so it is possible for all eight people to hold onto each other when leaving the plane. The difficult part is getting the team members to skydive in their own space and on the same level as the rest of the team. Pete was not able to make the first day of our camp as he was in Italy coaching another team, so we worked hard on the exits on our own. Within minutes of watching our video footage Pete identified a couple of seemingly small improvements that fixed the exits for the rest of the camp.



A TYPICAL TRAINING DAY

07H00: WAKE UP

Head to the drop zone via the supermarket for lunch supplies, grabbing a 'Café con leche' on the way.

08H15: PLANNING JUMPS

We all meet at the skydiving centre for a 'dirt diving' session, and then plan three different skydives for the first jumping session. To get a realistic view of each skydive, 'dirt diving' is practising the sequence of the formations on creepers (rather like large skateboards). This is physically quite hard, uncomfortable work and we aim to be as efficient as possible on the creepers. As soon as the creeping is done, we stretch, prepare our equipment and get kitted up for the jumps.

09H00: TAKE OFF

We climb into the plane, and as it climbs to 13,000 ft we spend the plane ride visualising the jump as some of the 8-way jumps are quite complicated and every jump requires concentration. The Twin Otter takes 24 skydivers at a time and there would often be one or two 4-way teams, the 8-way, fun jumpers, and a tandem or two. All the teams are visualising their jump, so they tend to be quiet. However, the fun jumpers and tandem passengers are in the plane to have fun and understandably want to chat, laugh and even sing. This can be quite distracting when you are desperately trying to remember your own jump.

On a jump run a series of lights indicate the exit point and we climb out of the aircraft. For an 8-way, we have five jumpers and the cameraman outside the aircraft and three inside the door. Our goal is to have all nine leave together and transition smoothly into the jump sequence. We have a timed exit 'rock' to achieve this. After the jump we use a specific landing order to ensure we land our parachutes next to the hanger as safely, but as quickly as possible. We take off one rig (parachute harness) and leave it for the packers, pick up a second rig, walk through the next skydive and then literally run to the waiting plane.

After three jumps we have approximately 40 minutes to debrief the skydives by watching the video footage and identify improvements so they can be repeated, or prepare another three jumps for the next cycle.

On a perfect weather day we would land our twelfth jump at around 16h00, and then meet for a detailed debriefing session in which each jump is watched, dissected and discussed. We will also look at areas of improvement and points to remember for the next block or formation.



17H00: ALL DONE FOR THE DAY

Different teams have different regimes for the end of their day. Although we are disciplined, we use the time to remember that skydiving is fun and a training camp in Spain is a time to enjoy. So we'll have one or two beers at the Drop Zone bar and then head into town for dinner before heading back to our rooms for an early night.

After six days of training we managed to do 52 jumps, despite some bad weather. Bailey did his 1,000th skydive and was treated to the traditional cream pie in the face celebration. The quality of the skydives was higher than expected, leaving the team very motivated and looking towards the world champs.

WHAT NEXT?

Inspired by some great skydiving during the jump camp, Voodoo8 had an additional wind tunnel training camp at Bodyflight Bedford in mid October. The five-and-a-half hours of flying in the wind tunnel gave us the opportunity to break down and practise the particular moves of each formation.

In addition to the camps, personal training and preparation needs to be done by each team member as it's really important that everyone maintains or improves their personal fitness levels, incorporating cardiovascular and strength training. Some of the faster-falling team members will also be looking to lose some weight, to make it easier to free fall at the same speed as the rest of the team.

Skydiving is 'mind work' and remembering the intricacies of each skydive is one of the major hurdles to overcome. Therefore, it's critical that everyone spends time visualising the different skydives and thinking about their moves in each jump. At the time of going to print Team Voodoo was in a good place heading into the world championship in November, in Dubai. •

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Visit www.facebook.com/pages/Skydive-Empuriabrava/44214266003?ref=ts&fref=ts to find out what other events are taking place.

Related articles:

- Thailand Express 400, Part 1 (Issue 17, p. 52)
- Tunnel Time! (Issue 16, p. 42)
- Wingsuit Meets Parachute: Team XRW Takes Off and Gives Back (Issue 14, p. 42)

RUNNING WILD

THE WILDCOAST WILDRUN IS ARGUABLY SOUTH AFRICA'S PREMIER MULTI-DAY TRAIL RUNNING EVENT. OVER THE COURSE OF THREE UNFORGETTABLE DAYS, COMPETITORS RUN, RAMBLE AND ROLL THEIR WAY NORTH ALONG SOUTH AFRICA'S MOST REMOTE AND CAPTIVATING STRETCH OF WILDERNESS COASTLINE. WITH A FEARSOME REPUTATION FOR UNPREDICTABLE AND GUSTY WEATHER, THE OCEAN-RAVAGED WILD COAST IS BOTH INSANELY BEAUTIFUL AND UNFORGIVINGLY BRUTAL. I STRAPPED ON MY ADIDAS SUPERNOVA RIOTS AND TACKLED THE LONG TRAIL ACROSS WINDSWEPT BEACHES, TIDAL ESTUARIES AND ROLLING GRASSY HILLS TO SAMPLE THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE 2012 WILDRUN FIRSTHAND. THREE DAYS AND 114 KM LATER I HAULED MYSELF OVER THE FINISH LINE AT THE HOLE IN THE WALL EXHAUSTED BUT ELATED.

Starting at the Great Kei River, roughly 80 km north of East London, the Wildcoast Wildrun traces the former Transkei coastline northwards all the way to Hole in the Wall: one of our country's most picturesque and iconic natural wonders. The Wildrun route is unmarked bar the start and finish of each stage, and runners need only stick close to the seashore, keeping the ocean on their right, to attain the finish line each day. For the elite runners at the front of the field race tactics and correctly choosing the path of least resistance are essential in their quest for glory. But for most people winning is the furthest thing from their mind; they come instead to immerse themselves in some of the most incredible coastal scenery and rugged running terrain to be found anywhere on our planet. ►



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DAY 1:

KEI RIVER MOUTH TO KOB INN

DISTANCE: 44 KM / VERTICAL GAIN: 285 M

For many participants, myself included, it is the anticipation of what is to come that is almost the hardest part of these types of events. As Race Director Owen Middleton gives his pre-race briefing, an electric atmosphere of palpable anticipation pervades the legendary Bush Pig Pub. Nervous energy seeps from competitors as they listen to what lies in store over the next 72 hours and you can sense that everyone is considering what the conditions will be like and how their race might unfold over the coming days. After chugging down a couple of carbo-loading beers, the crowd soon disperses, drifting away to try and get some sleep ahead of the longest and hardest stage of the Wildrun.

After a light breakfast and final toilet stop, runners board the Kei River Ferry and cross to the start of stage one. Thumping music greets our arrival and the ominous countdown to race time begins. At 07h30 sharp the race gets underway. Supercharged with nervous energy from the long wait, 80 runners surge down the riverbank in a tsunami of excitement and pour onto the beach. Fresh legs stride across the hard sand and eat up the first few kilometres with ease, but as the initial surge of adrenalin wears off the field soon spreads out along the wild shoreline.

A gale-force headwind, gusting up to 35 knots, makes an already challenging 44 km day considerably harder. A 10 km stretch of narrow, sandy coastline, interspersed with the occasional patch of slippery sea-swept rock, takes everyone past the imposing, rusting hulk of the Jacaranda shipwreck before the first of many ominous-looking estuaries confronts us at the 13 km mark. But, thankfully, it's nothing more than a waist-deep wade across the Khobonqaba River. Five kilometres later and we're already at Wavecrest and the first day's checkpoint, where we replenish our water supplies and rehydrate with the electrolyte offerings of product sponsor Hammer Nutrition.

The checkpoint break is short and sweet; soon we're crossing over the iNxaxo River and pounding down the beach once more. It's a long and relentless stretch of exposed beach that demands runners group up and take it in turn out front, running into the teeth of a relentless gale. Everyone puts their heads down and tuck in behind the leader to escape the worst of the wind and stinging sand. The conditions are hellishly tough and the Wildrun quickly separates the men from the boys!

Passing through Mazeppa Bay, the trail temporarily leaves the sand and detours onto undulating grassy terrain; it's a welcome relief after the windswept beach. By the time we finally catch sight of the Wildrun flags that mark the end of day one, most competitors are running out of water and suffering from dehydration.

After five relentless hours of racing, a final splash through the Qorha River Mouth causes many a hamstring to tighten and cramp, but the sight of the wonderful Kob Inn and swimming pool energises even the most utterly spent runners for one final push.



DAY 2:

KOB INN TO THE HAVEN

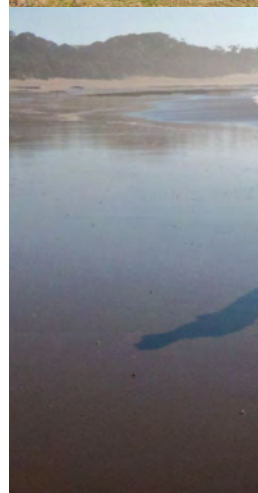
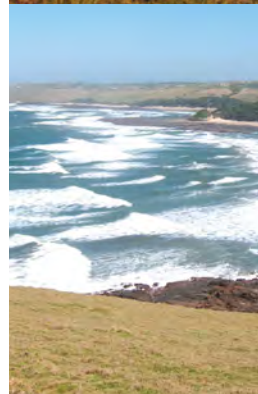
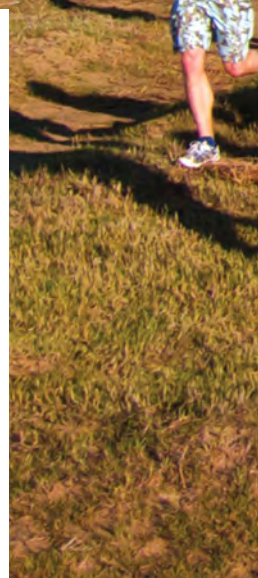
DISTANCE: 36 KM / VERTICAL GAIN: 510 M

Picking up a jeep track from the gates of Kob Inn, the stage two route immediately sets off across gently sloping grasslands alongside a stormy sea. Respite from the wind-ravaged beach is short-lived and after just 3 km we encounter the first water hazard of the day at Jujura River; a refreshing dip ensures everyone is wide awake and ready to run.

The first half of day two is a mixture of hard-packed cattle trails across rolling green hills interspersed with sections of gale-blasted beach. The underfoot conditions along the cattle tracks are a bit slippery, demanding a runner's total concentration to avoid a stumble or twisting an ankle.

WITH 10 KM OF GAME TRAIL RUNNING THROUGH PRISTINE COASTAL FOREST AND CATTLE-FREE GRASSY HILLS, THE REAL HIGHLIGHT OF DAY TWO GREETES COMPETITORS UPON ENTERING THE UNSPOILT DWESA NATURE RESERVE. THE VEGETATION AND SCENERY IS NOTHING SHORT OF SPECTACULAR. OUR EYES SCOUR THE OPEN GRASSLANDS FOR RHINOS, BUT THE GREY BEHEMOTHS REMAIN ELUSIVE.

A final sand-blasted stretch of exposed beach takes us to the Mbhashe River Mouth and biggest swim of the entire Wildrun. Diving into the muddy water and using the arms instead of the legs provides welcome relief. Just 2 km further on the stage two finish at the Haven Hotel comes into view. We all collapse into the swimming pool, sip cold beer and sign up for massages; it's a sure-fire recipe to rejuvenate even the weariest Wildrunner. ▶





DAY 3:

THE HAVEN TO HOLE IN THE WALL

DISTANCE: 34 KM / VERTICAL GAIN: 880 M

Surprisingly, the pristine beauty of Dwesa Nature Reserve struggles to compete with the scenic terrain and gobsmacking views that dominate stage three of the Wildrun. The first half of the final day is on mixed terrain - mostly small beaches broken up by rocky points and grassy headlands - while the second half is dominated by grassy slopes crisscrossed by a labyrinth of cattle trails and peppered with aloes. The steep climbs of the final day reward runners with some spectacular ocean views, and the final few kilometres are sheer trail running bliss with wide, hard-packed cattle trails that culminate at an elevated vantage point overlooking the finish in the shadow of a geological masterpiece: Hole in the Wall. It's downhill along fast single track all the way to one final river crossing and the end of a remarkable trail run.

After some hard racing and seesawing at the top of the leader board, Pierre van Rensburg eventually secured the overall win in the 2012 Wildcoast Wildrun by a mere 1min 47sec from Angelo Henry, while Tracey Almirall dominated the ladies race and added an impressive third overall to her superb Wildrun performance. Snapping at their heels were ART teammates Duncan Gutsche, Mike Arbuthnot, and myself, who kept the leaders honest and finished a couple of minutes off the pace. For many Wildrunners, however, the goal was simply to complete this extraordinarily bittersweet event.

The true Wildrun experience is difficult to reduce to words. The magnificence of the coastline is beyond contestation, but it is the sharing of unique experiences with like-minded people, the friendships forged through adversity, and the overcoming of shared hardships along the way that ultimately demands the Wildcoast Wildrun be included on every trail runner's bucket list. •



Related articles:

- Muizenberg Mountain Run - a Quantum Classic! (Issue 19, p.68)
- Spur Adventure Sprint Series (Issue 19, p. 86)
- Trail Running Safety (Issue 18, p. 70)

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2013 WILDCOAST WILDRUN EVENT

The Wildcoast Wildrun is organised by the experienced and professional Wildrunner trail running team (www.wildrunner.co.za). Taking place in mid-September each year, the Wildrun comprises two departures: the more social Journey followed a week later by the Race. The field is limited to a maximum of 80 entrants per event due to logistical challenges and accommodation restrictions.

Entries for the 2013 edition open on 17 January 2013 at midday, and all 160 places usually sell out within 45 minutes. Check out www.wildrun.co.za or get in touch with the registrations manager, Tamaryn Jupp, at info@wildrun.co.za for further details.

Tips

Participants should start training at least three months prior to the event and work on steadily building up their mileage. Make sure to concentrate a decent amount of training time on beach runs and/or sandy terrain. The Wild Coast is notorious for its strong winds, so run into a stiff headwind whenever you get the chance during training.

There is one 'munchie point' on each stage where co-sponsor Gu Energy Labs provides a range of energy drinks and rehydration supplements, however, runners must carry sufficient nutrition to last the duration of each stage.

Only consider doing this event if you're comfortable running long distances on the beach and aren't put off by the prospect of a stiff headwind.

Places to stay

- The Thatches - www.thethatches.co.za
- Kei Sands - www.keisands.co.za
- Kob Inn Hotel - www.kobinn.co.za
- The Haven Hotel - www.thehavenhotel.co.za
- Ocean View Hotel - www.oceanview.co.za

Other things to do in the area

If running 115 km along the Wild Coast sounds too much like hard work, then you might consider a more sedate hiking excursion (www.wildcoast.co.za/hiking) along South Africa's wildest and most scenically spectacular coastline.

Sponsor

The Wildcoast Wildrun would not have been possible without the generous financial backing of premier sponsor Adidas (www.adidas.co.za), which also provided some top-quality technical running kit to competitors.



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QUANTUM LEAP LESSONS AND THE SEQUEL!

MY CELL PHONE RINGS AND I SEE THAT IT'S ONE OF THE TEAMS ON TOP OF OORLOGSKLOOF MOUNTAIN. TEAM LALA OBVIOUSLY FOUND ONE OF THE FEW LOCATIONS WHERE THERE IS SKETCHY CELL RECEPTION. It's now 10h00 and the third morning of the inaugural Quantum Leap; 270 km of in-your-face, no nonsense, true expedition-style adventure racing.

I've been able to monitor all the teams' progress on my laptop since the start of the race because they carry Guardian tracking devices - an essential item in this rugged, remote, and extremely isolated terrain. Although the area is unforgiving and brutal, it is indescribably stunning! And the more remote and devoid of human intervention, the higher the risk, but with that comes unrivalled wilderness adventure.

Team Lala's tracking-device battery had gone flat and the last time I had received a signal from them was at midnight, at CP16; the last checkpoint before descending the mountain to T6. Like the other teams, they had already spent more than 20 hours on this ancient landscape of Oorlogskloof Mountain, or War Mountain if you translate it, and I had expected them to get off the mountain around 03h00, well within the cut-off time of 10h00.

Answering my phone, a very tired team member told me they were lost. Having tracked them to CP16 the night before, I was surprised to hear this. I could hear that morale was low, and they were intent on getting to an escape route and exiting the race, even though there was still enough time to finish the race on a shorter route. Trying to work



out where they were, I asked them to look at the hiking trail map they had been given at the start of the race, along with the other maps. "What hiking trail map?" they asked. "Oh, we thought it was marketing material and left it behind!" they replied, with regret, disappointment, and frustration in their voices. This was the nature of the Leap! It turns out they were near CP16, but on a track higher up and parallel to the actual track where the CP was positioned in a kloof. Sleep deprived, and with a cold front moving in, they literally lost the plot - pun intended! Somehow, they convinced themselves that they were on the right track and just continued walking - back in the direction they had come from, many hours before. Close to CP14, which is about 12 km in the opposite direction, they managed to find cell reception, and hence the call.

SPINNING THE WEB

The challenges faced by teams included making shrewd route choices, finding their way in the dark with no track to follow, negotiating grade 4 rapids on the freezing and full-flowing Doring River, selecting the correct times to rest for an hour or two, and staying focused and cohesive as a team! It was not meant to be easy, and I had spent a considerable amount of time planning, plotting and spinning this complex web to achieve this. I'd also experienced this gruelling route firsthand when planning it, and knew it would be no push over when I ran out of water, had to carry my mountain bike for hours on end in search of rideable tracks, scrambled up and abseiled down overgrown kloofs, valleys and steep cliffs - all in the middle of summer - and was confronted by a black spitting cobra in Oorlogskloof!

RACE TACTICS

The pre-race briefing had actually started a few weeks before the event took place - some teams just didn't realise it. Many photos, clues, and other details were posted on Quantum Adventures' Events FB page, and although not critical, some of the images and narrative could certainly have assisted with route planning and other decisions.

During the race briefing, various other clues and hints were given out, and it was made clear that teams who made shrewd and decisive route choices would be rewarded. One such team was Team WCAD, who made a bold route choice after a 90 m abseil and exited the deep gorge via a steep crack in the cliff face. Once Team WCAD reached the top of the cliff, they covered the 6 km on a footpath and open terrain in less than 90 minutes! They leapfrogged Team Cyanosis and closed the gap on Merrell Adventure Addicts to within an hour! The teams that stayed in the gorge took up to six hours to cover 6 km in dense bush and technical terrain, with the Oorlogskloof River and high cliffs hugging them on either side. In total, only three of the 18 teams chose this quick route.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNT

None of the teams had a flawless race, and that is totally in line with traditional adventure racing. In my experience, I've seldom seen a team that's had a perfect race and generally it's the most 'consistent' teams, who make the fewest mistakes and nail one or two big navigation moves, which do well.

The biggest single reason why teams did not complete the Quantum Leap was due to poor navigation; the by-products being low team morale and wasted time. There are too many teams who 'think' they can navigate and this view is often based on their previous experiences at races where navigation may not have been as challenging, or offered a few or any route choices. Navigation is an exact science and once you understand the formula and interaction between a compass, map, altimeter, and the terrain, you almost have everything you need to successfully navigate any terrain, be it night or day! Focus and application are just as important, and this comes with time and repetition. A great way to understand the many nuances of navigation is to carry a 1:50 000 topographic map with you wherever you run, paddle, mountain bike or explore. Comparing the features around you to what's on the map will create a 'focussed and sharper' interpretation, and before long you will be able to read the map much quicker and memorise it a whole lot better. ▶



Other reasons why teams struggled on the route and/or withdrew were:

- **Poor team dynamics.** Train with your teammates well before the race so you are all on the same programme once it's time to take the Leap.
- **Dithering along the route or in transition.** When one person gets hot or cold and removes or add layers, the rest of the team should consider doing it at the same time. Alternatively, the rest of the team keeps moving while that person catches up. In other words, the train should never stop!
- **Transition troubles.** Before reaching a transition, the team should decide on what a reasonable amount of time to spend there is and who will do what.
- **Not looking after the navigator in transition.** Remember that the navigator needs to plan the next route, change maps, and make corrections whilst the rest of the team is happily replenishing. So don't forget about their needs.
- **Not assisting the navigator.** The whole team should be alert and aware of features on the ground that might assist with route decisions because the navigator, who is focussed on the overall route, could easily miss lateral features, especially at night when visibility is poor.

TRY THIS ON A MOUNTAIN BIKE LEG

Here is a basic tip that will assist you on a mountain bike leg in any weather, day or night. Before starting the leg, break the route down in small chunks. If you have a distance measuring device, measure the distance from the start to the next significant landmark next to or near the route, and then mark the map with an arrow or similar indicating that landmark. From that landmark keep doing the same along the route; every 4-10 km is good. Since all team members 'should' have an odometer on their bike, the team can now safely move along using this tip to ensure they don't pass these landmarks unnoticed.

THE SEQUEL

NAMAQUA QUANTUM LEAP, AUGUST 2013

Unfinished business! Those were popular words uttered at the end of the 2012 race from some teams. And so the vastness of this undiscovered and unexplored ancient land invites the inquisitive to keep on exploring by entering the Namaqua Quantum Leap in August 2013! Remember, this is not an ordinary race! So if you dare to take on this challenge, be prepared to learn things about yourself that you did not realise you possessed. •

Related articles:

- Muizenberg Mountain Run - a Quantum Classic! (Issue 19, p. 68)
- New Trail Run a Must (Digital article, September '12)
- Oorlogskloof Mountain Trail Run - a one-of-a-kind mountain trail race (Issue 16, p. 96)

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Entries for the 2013 Namaqua Quantum Leap opens on 1 February 2013. To enter, visit www.quantumadventures.co.za.

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BLACK MOUNTAIN MAGIC TOUR

SOUTH AFRICA, WITH ITS MANY AMAZING MOUNTAIN BIKING ROUTES, IS PERFECT FOR TOURING, AND ONE SUCH GEM IS THE BLACK MOUNTAIN MAGIC TOUR.

This seven-day, six-night mountain biking tour starts on the Garden Route and finishes in the quaint Karoo town of Calitzdorp, the wine port capital of South Africa. It's an incredible journey that takes riders from the verdant coast to the semi-arid Karoo, over two spectacular mountain passes - the Montagu and Swartberg Passes - and through some of the loveliest mountain scenery in South Africa.

The tour takes its name from the major mountain range that is crossed several times during the course of the week, the Swartberg, or Black Mountain. The climate on this mountain is characterised by extremes and the weather changes dramatically and quickly. It can be extremely hot in summer, while snowfalls are not uncommon in winter. So come prepared and bring your climbing legs. Although none of the riding is technical there are some steep climbs, as this is a mountain tour after all! But don't despair as backup vehicles and many rest stops make it an achievable ride for any reasonably fit mountain biker. ►

TRAIL AT A GLANCE:

Distance: +/- 354 km

Duration: 7 days

Difficulty: 2

Trail type: Gravel roads and mountain passes

Logistics: Guided and catered

Bike hire: Yes, on request

Accommodation: Luxury cottages, lodges, and B&Bs

Cost: Two guests - R18 947 pp sharing. Three guests - R15 550 pp sharing. Four plus guests - R11 448 pp sharing. Rates are subject to change without notice. Tour prices include all accommodation, meals, snacks, cold drinks, backup vehicle, guide, permits, and transfers from Knysna to the starting point and return. It excludes all alcoholic beverages.

Areas: Garden Route and Karoo

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DAY 1 - GEORGE TO DE RUST

75 KM | 5-6 HOURS | GRADE 2

The day starts with a superb climb from George up the Montagu Pass, one of the first wagon routes to be built over the Outeniqua Mountains and completed in 1847. The gravel road up the pass, which climbs 600 m in 10 km, looks daunting but even if you take it easy you'll top out in an hour or so and can then pat yourself on the back in the knowledge that you've overcome one of the biggest challenges of the tour. As you climb take time to admire the incredible views, or ask your guide about the history of the pass or various features along the way like the old toll-house, a national monument. Apparently this is where George's shoe industry started with the first toll-keeper and his son making veldskoens, which they sold to passersby. The beautiful Keur River bridge is also a national monument and good place to stop if you need to cool off or refill your water bottle. Or you could follow the example of the wagon drivers of yesteryear who would knock back a tot of local brew at Grogdraal as their oxen drank from the stream. Despite the proximity of George and the bustling towns along the Garden Route, you feel like you are deep in the wilderness at this point. The majestic Outeniqua Mountains tower around you and the fynbos is beautiful. Tony Cook, your guide, will enlighten you on the significance of the Cape floral kingdom, the smallest, but richest floral kingdom in the world, and point out the major species in bloom.

Once up and over, the scenery changes as you leave the fynbos covered slopes of the Garden Route behind and cruise down and past fields of hops to the small village of Herold, then over the R62 and onto a long stretch of undulating gravel road, the Paardepoot Pass. You're now in the arid, rocky 'badlands' of the Klein Karoo and the place has a bit of a Wild West feel. Ostrich farms line the road and these big birds often gather to check you out when you stop for snack breaks or to pick up their feathers. Ostrich products provide much needed income for the people of this area, but the birds completely destroy the land and the fields are just dirt. The tour continues past the Kammanasie Dam and up the last steep hill of the day before taking on the sweeping downhill on the other side. You continue past a quaint little church on the hill above Dysveldorp and follow the Rus-en-Vrede Road to the overnight stop at Oudemuragie, a working farm with cottages nestled in the foothills of the Swartberg Mountain.

DAY 2 - DE RUST TO SWARTBERG GAME RESERVE

60-75KM | 5 HOURS | GRADE 2

The route takes you on an undulating ride over gravel roads to the Swartberg Private Game Reserve. The first 30 km is on dirt, then it's an easy 20 km stretch of tar road and a couple of gentle climbs before cranking the pedals on some rocky roads as you check out the game. You can choose to park off and relax at the private house that is your home for the night, but be warned that sightings usually include giraffe, impala, wildebeest, zebra and eland - so the beers can wait. The distance covered in the reserve depends on the game sightings and your fitness, but this ride, with the majestic Swartberg Mountain as the backdrop, is one you will not want to end. A dip in the pool, cold beer and a home-cooked feast on a log fire rounds off a fantastic day.

DAY 3 - SWARTBERG GAME RESERVE TO PRINCE ALBERT

55 KM | 4 HOURS | GRADE 2

Day three is tough but rewarding. After a fairly leisurely start along the scenic Groenfontein Road you tackle the second biggest challenge of the tour, the switchbacks up the southern side of the Swartberg Pass. Get into granny gear and you'll manage the 10 km climb no problem, but if you are taking strain you can always take the easy route and catch a ride in the backup vehicle. Completed in 1888, this amazing road rises to a height of 1,585 m above sea level. The vistas over the jagged peaks and deeply incised gorges of the Swartberg range are stunning. It's a wicked 18 km descent into the delightful town of Prince Albert. If you want to take it slowly there's plenty of diversions along the way such as the ruins of convict labourers' quarters and the huts at OuTol, one of the overnight huts on the Swartberg hiking trail. There are also a couple of short, circular hiking trails where you can enjoy the magnificent fynbos of this range, one of the protected areas that make up the Cape Floral Region World Heritage Site.

Dennehof Country House is your base for the next couple of nights, and only 5 km from the bottom of the pass. It's a wonderful reward for your efforts, so prepare to be spoilt. After a superb meal of succulent Karoo lamb washed down with a good bottle of red wine, you end the day tucked up in a four-poster bed feeling like royalty.

DAY 4 - PRINCE ALBERT LOOP OR OPTIONAL REST DAY

54 KM | 5-6 HOURS | GRADE 3

There's no vehicle support on this route, so those who don't feel up to another day in the saddle can relax and explore Prince Albert. For the riders, it's a short transfer back up the pass to the top of the Swartberg Mountain and the entrance to the Swartberg Nature Reserve where you'll ride through the fynbos along a jeep track with some testing ups and downs for 27 km to the Gouekrans Mountain hut. After a snack at the hut it's back to Dennehof for a sumptuous lunch and some relaxation.

DAY 5 - PRINCE ALBERT TO SWARTBERG NATURE RESERVE PLUS AN OPTIONAL RIDE IN THE RESERVE

55 KM | 4-5 HOURS | GRADE 2

Day five is another big day with roughly 1,400 m of ascent. You start retracing your steps with the winding and twisting route up the northern side of the Swartberg Pass that you rode down on day three. By now your legs and lungs should be strong enough to enjoy the steady climb and numerous hairpin bends. After a fast descent down the other side it's back to the Swartberg Private Nature Reserve for lunch, after which you can choose to ride a different route on the reserve or take a nap.



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DAY 6 - SWARTBERG TO CALITZDORP

55 KM | 4 HOURS | GRADE 1

After the climbs of the last few days this is an easy stage on the undulating Groenfontein gravel road back to Calitzdorp. A section of this route follows what was stage two in the inaugural Absa Cape Epic. Riding through typical Karoo vegetation, twitchers will be in heaven as black (Verreaux's) eagles, pale chanting goshawk, and many other beautiful birds are often sighted in this area. After checking in to the Spekboom Cottages, there's time to discover the town's delights. A wine/port tasting or a soak in the natural hot spring baths is a fitting end to a week of pampering and spectacular mountain biking.

DAY 7 - CALITZDORP TO GEORGE/KNYSNA

After breakfast it's an hour's drive back to Knysna/George Airport before you depart for home. ▶



DINfo box

Bookings: Tony Cook Adventures -
tony@tonycookadventures.co.za
www.tonycookadventures.co.za.

Start/finish: George or Knysna.

Transfers: Transfers back to the start are included.

Highlights: Riding the Montagu and Swartberg Mountain Passes and the views; game sightings in the Swartberg Private Nature Reserve; and the towns of Prince Albert and Calitzdorp.

Longest day: 75 km.

Shortest day: 54 km.

Group size: Minimum two, maximum 10.

Suitable for: This straightforward trail is suitable for riders of all ages and levels of experience. It's also a great training ride for stage races such as the Karoo to Coast or joberg2c.

Logistics: This is a guided, fully-catered trail with accommodation at guesthouses. Bags are transported in the backup vehicle.

When to go: The tour is offered year round, but March/April or October/November are the best months, as summers are very hot, and there's often snow in the mountains in winter.

Before and after: Spend a few days on the Garden Route - www.gardenroute.co.za.



Book Review
 Author: Fiona McIntosh

FREEWHEELING SOUTHERN AFRICA'S BEST MULTI-DAY MTB TRAILS

From short, easy one-night escapes suitable for the whole family, to hard-core mountain adventures that will test even the most experienced, competitive racers, the 34 trails of southern Africa's best multi-day trails and wilderness journeys, including detailed descriptions, gradings, elevations, profiles, logistics and altitude gain, featured in this book cover the full spectrum of mountain bike tours on offer in South Africa and neighbouring countries.

A guide and support vehicle accompanies most of the tours, meaning that someone else takes care of the logistics and you are left free to enjoy the best that mountain biking offers.

Whether you want to ride with big game, along empty beaches, through verdant forests or across barren deserts you'll find a trail to suit, and there are also some specialist trails that are aimed at birders, gourmands and culture-vultures. As the waiting lists for the stage races grow (and with them the entry fees) touring offers an alternative way to get your dirt fix - an active holiday with a group of friends or family. The Black Mountain Magic tour is just one of the many amazing adventures contained in this book.

Book information

ISBN: 978-1920289-53-9

Pages: 184

Release date: August 2012

Images: 150 photographs

Cost: R 185.00

About the author

After riding the inaugural Tour de Wilderness mountain bike tour, photojournalist Fiona McIntosh tried her hand at stage racing, completing the ABSA Cape Epic in 2007. Fiona is now a social rider who looks forward to a soft bed, good meal and some fine wine after a hard day in the saddle. •



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Sonia Simmård (Canada) and Jurg Buechli (Switzerland) on the Pamir Highway.

CYCLING THE SILK ROAD

“

In July I joined the second half of the Silk Route bicycle expedition organised by Tour d'Afrique, a trans-continental bicycle tour company. Approximately 25 cyclists had joined their quest to cycle the famous 12,000 km Silk Road from Shanghai, China, Istanbul, to Turkey. Meeting up with them in Kashgar a few days before they crossed the Chinese border into Kyrgyzstan, it was clear that they had already overcome several challenges in their two-month journey across the enormous country of China. The tough times were not about to end. ▶ ”

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For thousands of years the Silk Road has enticed and enthralled travellers from all over the world. The stories and adventures that surround the route shroud it in mystique and history, and still lure modern-day adventurers to explore this important part of the modern world's history. For some the appeal is the tales of adventures and following in the footsteps of famous explorers and conquerors such as Marco Polo, Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan; while others are simply there for the challenge of a journey of such magnitude. Whatever their reasons, I can honestly say that travelling on what was once the only trade and cultural link between east and west is worth it.

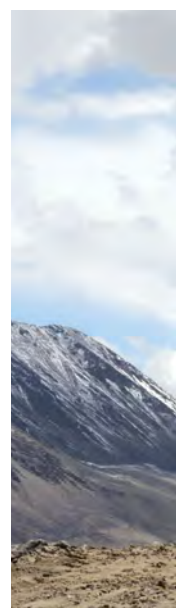
MEETING THE TEAM

When meeting the group, I was introduced to some weather-beaten, tired-looking people, who regaled tales of getting lost in sudden dust storms while crossing the Gobi and Taklamakan Deserts, rain storms, intense heat, and the worst thing that any cyclist can think of: riding into a headwind for two straight weeks. The bikes were also a bit worse for wear, a pulverised bottom bearing being the most evident consequence of the almost 6,000 km that had already been covered. It had obviously been a tough two months and now we were heading to the mountains, to cross the Pamir Highway and cycle at altitude for the next three weeks. And who knew what we could expect beyond that?

THE HILLS ARE ALIVE

Although I have heard of the countries we would be travelling through, I must admit that I didn't know much about them except that they all ended with -stan and are located in Central Asia. The scenery I expected was what I had seen of Afghanistan on CNN; harsh, dry deserts, and people dressed like Lawrence of Arabia. Once again I was reminded that there's nothing like travelling to a place yourself, to have all your pre-conceived ideas shattered.

Arriving in Kyrgyzstan, it seemed as though we'd taken a wrong turn somewhere and ended up in the Alps. Instead of the desert landscapes I had expected to find in the '-stans' we were surrounded by snow-capped mountain peaks, rolling green hills and even Edelweiss flowers. Horses abounded and fresh spring water was delivered to our camp by young local boys on their donkeys. As we cycled deeper into this part of the world the scenery remained breathtaking, but it became colder every day, the road surface progressively worse, and the cycling more and more challenging as we reached higher altitudes. By the time we reached Tajikistan the paved roads were more pothole than road and the mountain passes were unpaved, making both the uphill and downhill that much more testing. Despite these challenges we were energised by the sheer, untouched beauty that surrounded us. Vast inspiring expanses enveloped us one day before the sight of Lake Karakul in the distance took our breath away the next, and colourful plates of wild flowers surrounded us a few days later. On a particularly beautiful day we climbed two mountain passes covered with snow early in the morning before descending on the other side. Following the course of the developing Gunt River later that day, the view changed from a small stream of melting snow to a mad rush of water at the bottom of the mountains. **IT WAS A SPECTACULAR DAY OF CYCLING AND PROBABLY MY FAVOURITE OF THE TOUR, AS IT WAS SIGHTS LIKE THESE THAT MADE ALL THE PAIN AND SUFFERING WORTH IT.**





However beautiful the scenery was though, it was the people of both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan that made this part of the trip truly special. One such occasion was when three fellow cyclists and I stopped for a snack next to the road and decided to take a stroll towards two yurts (portable, bent wood-framed dwelling structure), about 100 m from the road. As we arrived the family welcomed us - complete strangers - with open arms and invited us in for lunch, despite the fact that we could hardly communicate with each other. Inside their lovely warm home we were surprised to see how beautifully decorated a plain old white yurt was on the inside. After eating fresh bread, watermelon and kumis (fermented horse milk) for lunch, we felt satiated and privileged to have experienced a true part of the Kyrgyzstan mountain life ... except for the kumis, something I never want to taste again.

A CITY UNDER SIEGE

Halfway through Tajikistan and in the middle of the Pamir Highway we arrived in the town of Khorog, ready for a well-deserved day off our bicycles. Located on the border of Afghanistan and in the autonomous Gorno-Badakhshan province, it doesn't take much to spark trouble in this area. There hasn't been any conflict here for almost 30 years, but the recent murder of an ex-KGB General meant that Tajik government forces had moved in to search for the perpetrators. Overnight, the town changed from a quiet mountain town into a war zone and we woke to the sound of gun and mortar fire the next day. Communication in the area was shut down and we were effectively stuck in a city under siege for four days before vehicles from various European embassies were sent to evacuate us.

The 600 km journey from Khorog to the country's capital, Dushanbe, took two days as we bumped over rough mountain passes in the vehicles. Disappointed that we didn't get to cycle the 600 km, ultimately it contributed to the overall Silk Route's experience, as we really got to understand the risks and uncertainty that the ancient explorers were faced with on their travels.

THE AXIS OF EVIL

The fact that we'd already been stuck in one war zone didn't do much to ease some of the cyclists' concern about visiting a country that previous US President George W. Bush had labelled as the 'axis of evil'. None of us knew what to expect from Iran, a country that follows Sharia law and is currently the centre of many international debates and discussions. From day one though all our fears were dispersed, as we were welcomed with open arms and invited to picnics everywhere we went.

When cycling or simply walking along the streets we were stopped and many of us received gifts of nuts, fruit, sweets, and chai (tea) from people next to the road, who were worried about our well-being after cycling such a long way. Every local that spoke to us wanted to know what we were doing and why, and all of them were extremely happy to have western tourists in their country. There was no animosity or tension, and only hospitality, friendliness and endless smiles. ►



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:

1. One of our camps in Iran, a beautiful small mosque
2. Camping with the locals in Kyrgyzstan
3. A wonderful lunch with Kyrgyz locals in their yurt
4. Martin van der Valk (Netherlands) arrives for lunch in Turkey
5. Chris Wille (Canada) heads to an epic downhill in Iran
6. Debra Banks (USA) at the top of a climb in the Pamir Mountains

The highest camp on the tour (4,200 m above sea level), the day before reaching the highest point on tour (4,600 m) in Tajikistan



Our route took us through forests, past sunflower fields, and Karoo-like landscapes, and all of us were ecstatic that we were back on smooth, paved roads. We camped in some special spots, one of which was an old caravanserai, a building where Silk Road traders used to spend the night with their goods and camels in relative safety from bandits.

If there is one thing I can say about the Iranians, other than they are extremely hospitable, it's that they know how to party. We arrived in Iran on the last day of Ramadan and for three days straight the majority of the population were having picnics and spending time with their families in parks all over. It was an honour to visit this country and meet some of the most hospitable people on the planet.

THE FINAL FRONTIER

Crossing the final border on a trip such as this is always a little special, and it was no different as we made our way into Turkey, the final country on our itinerary. After cycling at more than 4,000 m above sea level a couple of months before, we did not expect to be challenged as much as we were by the mountains of Turkey, which didn't take us much higher than 2,000 m above sea level. We soon realised, however, that the last few weeks on the road were not going to be easy.

Upon entering Turkey we made our way around Mount Ararat before riding up and down, up and down, and up and down again over hundreds of mountains and valleys. We were gobsmacked by the natural beauty of this part of the world, but we were often left wondering about the sanity of Turkish engineers, the accusations being thrown around becoming more irrational as we grew more exhausted. Did they not know about the concept of bridges or did they just hate cyclists? Suffice to say, there is no such thing as a flat piece of earth in Turkey. At least the scenery and cafes dotted along the road made up for the hard work. Climbing and descending on small, tree-lined, twisty lanes, and being surprised by yet another quaint little village around the corner also made for enjoyable riding all the way into Istanbul.

IN A NUTSHELL

The first question people usually ask when they hear you've done something like this is: Why? Why do you want to ride 12,000 km on a bicycle? Why do you want to camp for four-and-a-half months? Why do you want to be stuck on a black, paved road in 40 degrees heat? Or for that matter, why do you want to go for a ride when it's snowing outside?

For me it's not about being able to say I've cycled across Asia or crossed a continent on a bike. It's about learning more about the world and myself. It's about realising that the people of Central Asia are some of the most hospitable and generous people in the world, and that the people of Iran are not warmongers.

IT'S ABOUT UNDERSTANDING THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE EAST
AND WEST BETTER THAN ANY
HISTORY LESSON COULD EVER TEACH
ME. SO WHY DID I DO IT? TO SEE FOR
MYSELF. TO EXPERIENCE. TO LIVE. •

Related articles:

- 94.7 Cycle Challenge - ride for a purpose (Issue 19, p. 132)
- Across the Spine of Taiwan (Issue 15, p.22)
- Solo Across Western Sahara (Issue 15, p.26)

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Tour d'Afrique (TdA) is a cross-continental bicycle touring company based in Toronto, Canada. They run several cross-continental bicycle tours, including the Silk Route from Shanghai to Istanbul and the Tour d'Afrique from Cairo to Cape Town.

They have recently launched the cyclist's definitive bucket list, the 7 Epics. These are seven incomparable and extremely long, bicycle tours that cross entire continents, thread through 50 countries, and circumnavigate the globe, twice, when combined.

For more information visit their website at www.tourdafrique.com
FB: www.facebook.com/tourdafrique?ref=ts&fref=ts
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For more information on the following topics, please see the interactive application version of DO IT NOW Magazine.

- Travel costs and tips
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Arek Reclaw and Marcin Madry (Poland) on the first day in Iran

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TRAVEL COSTS AND TIPS

- To complete the full trip you can expect to pay about €12,000 or you can choose to only do one or two sections. The price of one section ranges between €1,500 to €2,500.
- You have to arrange your own travel to your starting point and provide your own bike. TdA provides support vehicles to carry your equipment, three meals a day, accommodation (of which most is camping, so you have to take camping equipment) and visa assistance to get into countries like Iran and Sudan. A bike mechanic and medic accompany you on the trip to look after any mechanical or physical issues.
- Approximately once a week you will have a rest day in an interesting town or city to do some sightseeing. On these days you have to provide your own food and pay for yourself if you want to do any side trips.

TRAINING TIPS

- Train for endurance. The faster riders spend at least four to five hours a day on their bikes, but us mere mortals often end up being in the saddle for eight to twelve hours every day. Prepare your rear-end for this punishment.
- On most tours the first couple of weeks are in pretty flat areas and most riders become stronger very quickly, using this time as further training for what lies ahead. However, don't think you can work your way up from 60 km to 120 km a day, as you will be doing more than 120 km from day one.
- By the time you reach the hills later in the tour, you'll be ready for them.

WHO CAN DO IT

- It goes without saying that you have to have a basic level of fitness if you want to take on a tour like this. A good guideline is whether you can cycle 100 km a day, every day for four months. Some sections are easier than others so you can sign up for one of them first before taking on a four-month tour to see if you really like it.
- The official age limit for participation is 18 – 75.

BIKE ACCESSORIES

- As you will be in the middle of nowhere for long parts of the trip the best advice is to keep things simple with your bike. No fancy gadgets or carbon frames that a mechanic won't be able to fix with some wrenches, a hammer and R5 coin.
- A simple bike rack to carry your day's supplies will come in handy as you don't want to carry all your equipment on your shoulders, and lots of bottle racks are essential!

GEAR/KIT CHOICES

- The most important thing when packing for a trip such as this is to pack light!
- Take at least six pairs of chamois, lots of sunscreen, and a warm, waterproof jacket.
- You will need a good tent and sleeping bag as this will contribute to your comfort level a great deal. Because the trip is so long you come across any number of weather conditions and you need to be prepared; dry in the rain and snow, and cool in the desert.
- Make sure your tent is easy to pitch and free-standing because often you will have to camp on concrete, with nowhere to pitch your stakes.
- GPS devices that need to be recharged every eight hours aren't the best idea, so rather opt for a simple odometer.



FROM TOP TO BOTTOM:

- 1.** Catharina in Tajikistan
- 2.** A water delivery to a camp in Kyrgyzstan
- 3.** Bike silhouette at sunset
- 4.** Jan Kremer (Netherlands) and Catharina get to know a cotton picker in Turkmenistan
- 5.** Drinking chai with some friendly Iranians next to the road
- 6.** Sigi Link (Germany) in Turkey



INAUGURAL JOZI2KOZI RIDE TAKES FLIGHT

THEY CAME FROM FAR AND WIDE; SOME AS FAR AFIELD AS COLORADO, USA, AND CAPE TOWN, TO THE SMALL TOWN OF NIGEL, FOR THE INAUGURAL JOZI2KOZI MOUNTAIN BIKE RIDE THAT TOOK PLACE FROM 25 TO 31 AUGUST 2012. THIS WAS NOT A RACE, BUT RATHER A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY, A MIGRATION OF THE SOUL FOR THE STRONG AND FIT, AND ONE THAT SPANNED 748 KM AND TOOK SEVEN DAYS TO COMPLETE.





FROM TOP TO BOTTOM:

1. The starting line 2. Loading the bus 3. Arriving at a Zulu kraal 4. Forging the Pongola 5. Humanitarian gesture 6. Peak-hour traffic 7. Helping others along the route 8. Three's company 9. A warm welcome at a Zulu kraal 10. Sitting with Zulu royalty (next page)

DAY 1 (124 KM)

There was an air of expectancy and excitement amongst the riders as they readied themselves for the start. After being welcomed by a Zulu 'imbongi' or praise singer, riders were cautioned of the challenges that lay ahead of them to their ultimate destination: Kosi Bay on the warm Indian Ocean bordering Mozambique.

The first day was all about rolling grasslands, mielie fields and corrugated gravel roads - all 120 km of them - until we reached the Grootdraai Dam Boat Club outside Standerton. Luckily there was a strong tail wind, thus ensuring that the first day was a manageable and enjoyable one.

DAY 2 (111 KM)

After filling up on boerewors and pap for breakfast, the riders were loaded onto ski boats and ferried across the dam, before wading in the icy, muddy waters to get to shore. More corrugated gravel roads followed, but this time they led towards the small, isolated town of Amersfoort. Passing through this century-old 'dorp', cyclists encountered the first of the so-called 'undulating hills'. Their progress was further hampered by a strong headwind and for many it was a welcome relief to finally take shelter and rest their weary bodies at the Country Trax Academy, where they devoured a delicious evening meal and listened to live, local 'boeremusiek'.

DAY 3 (106 KM)

This was a challenging day with rocket-fast descents and heart-attack ascents, including Bitch Hill. A prize of a weekend in Mozambique was on offer to anyone who managed to ride up it without stopping. The men in the group were sorely exposed when this hill was conquered by female rider Nataly, and so it was with shattered egos that everyone began referring to Bitch Hill as 'Nataly's Hill' (with the deepest respect to the skilled Nataly!).

Rocky hairpin descents down Puff Adder Pass had riders screaming in joy and terror as they made their way into the tiny German hamlet of Luneburg. Here they listened to a German 'Oompah Brass Band' practising a selection of foot stomping, thigh slapping German tunes, and were served traditional Eisbein and Jagermeister. Some of the participants were having such a great time that they stayed up until the wee hours of the morning, singing German war ballads with the farmers (and paid for it dearly a few hours later in the blistering heat and on the steep inclines).

DAY 4 (108 KM)

Quietly leaving Luneburg along a short section of tar, cyclists were starting to feel the strain of the long days in the saddle. The day's route meandered along forestry tracks and through the uMkhunyane Game Reserve, where riders gratefully plunged into a sparkling stream to cool down.

Back in the saddle, dusty corrugations led to the Klipwal Goldmine and a lightning-fast switchback descent into the Pongola River valley, which borders the Ithala Game Reserve. Crashes were inevitable on the loose gravel surface that made turning treacherous, and the paramedic was kept very busy patching up riders. Reaching the Pongola River crossing, there were armed game scouts from Ithala waiting on the opposite bank to ensure the riders safe passage across. But even with the game scouts on alert, nervous comments could be heard about the presence of unseen crocodiles, rhino and elephants. Needless to say, it was a quick crossing for everyone, and even the paramedic and his BMW motorcycle made it across the river in double quick time, albeit with much cursing, splashing and laughter. From there, the riders headed to the main camp at Ithala for a well-deserved rest. With a few cold ones enjoyed over another excellent dinner and a fantastic sunset, it was the perfect end to an adrenalin-filled day. ▶

DAY 5 (108 KM)

Seriously steep climbs, long winding descents and bumpy cattle paths were the order of the day as the speeding riders entered rural Zululand, dodging grazing cattle and goats in their path. This was a long, hot and tiring day, interspersed with stops at the local spaza shops to guzzle down ice-cold Cokes and answer the locals' incredulous questions: "You rode from eJozi? Haaibo! Why don't you catch a taxi?"

Passing through rural Zululand was an eye-opener for most cyclists, who commented on the locals' simple but hard way of life that is devoid of the frenetic chaos that comes with living in the city. Arriving at sundown to a gathering of several hundred people at Mr Mafuleka's kraal, the riders were greeted with much jubilation and singing. Despite being dog tired, they tucked into the ceremonial wildebeest served for supper with gusto, while delighting in the traditional dance routines before slipping off to bed.

DAY 6 (115 KM)

As dawn broke to the sound of hundreds of cockerels crowing in harmony with the bellowing of Nguni cattle, riders were already making their way to the privately-owned Zululand Rhino Reserve. After a briefing about conservation issues and sticking closely together, they proceeded towards Mkuze and encountered lots of plains' game, but luckily (or maybe not!) no lions, elephant, buffalo, rhino, or leopard.

Rolling gravel roads led to the Mkuze taxi rank and a surprise! The bikes were loaded onto the roof top of a waiting bus and everyone jumped in. After crawling up an extremely narrow pass to the top of the Lebombo Mountains, in the smoke-belching local bus, the bikes were offloaded and riders raced down into Maputaland towards Lake Sibaya. Jeep tracks, single tracks and very loose sandy paths tested the cyclists' skills and sense of humour on this unseasonably hot day, with temperatures reaching 38°C. The last 2 km stretch to the lake was through deep sand and thick forest, forcing many of the participants to get off their bikes and push. But the effort was well worth it when they sat down to dinner, at the edge of a pristine lake and under a full moon.

DAY 7 (83 KM)

This was the shortest day (yeah, but we all know Murphy!) consisting of 83 km of flat roads interspersed with sections of loose sand. Well, not quite. There was a lot more loose sand than expected and much of the time was spent falling headfirst into the sand, amidst loads of jesting, and cursing of the race organiser (myself).

After passing through the bustling border town of KwaNgwanase, there was a flat section of tar to the turn-off to Kosi Bay Mouth and then a little sting in the tail for those who thought they'd finished with the sand. To get to the magnificent viewpoint overlooking the century-old fish traps, estuary and Indian Ocean, there was a short section of thick sand to put the cherry on top of a wonderfully challenging journey through our country.

Kosi Bay Mouth, forming part of the isiMangaliso World Heritage Site, was the finishing point. And what an achievement it was for the riders; some had never ridden more than 50 km before, some had only bought their mountain bikes two weeks before this event, some did it on single speeds, some bonded deeply with their partners, and some bonded less deeply with their partners...



But what made this event extra special is that it was not just about the spectacular ride, it was also about the spirit of sharing humanity (ubuntu). Ubuntu is the focus of Jozi2Kozi's charity drive, and is about the cyclists actively and spontaneously engaging with local communities en route. As such, a daily highlight was the awarding of the ubuntu prize to those who had given out the most gifts of Lucky Star Sardines and blankets to the needy in the local communities along the route. These heart-warming gestures took place at schools, rural crèches, at water and washing points, and to grateful herdsman along the route.

ALL IN ALL, THE JOZI2KOZI WAS A HUGE SUCCESS AND A PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT FOR MANY RIDERS. SO DON'T MISS THE 2013 EVENT AND A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY OF EPIC PROPORTIONS. •



Related articles:

- Clever Nutrition for Mega Long Races (Issue 18 p. 84)
- Team Virtuoso Takes on the DCM Cape Pioneer Trek ... Again! (Issue 7, p. 88)
- SHOOT! A MTB Stage Race - Multi-day Shooting (Issue 19, p. 124)

dinFO box



The 2013 Jozi2Kozi event will take place from 25-31 August. A similar route will be followed except with more single track and jeep track across farmers' lands.

There are three Jozi2Kozi 2013 events to choose from:

1. Jozi2Kozi Challenge - this is for the racing snakes and endurance riders.
2. Jozi2Kozi Experience - this is for those who want to take it a little easier. Riders in this group will start about 25-30 km into the route so that they have time to ride, explore, and still finish in time to enjoy the overnight venues. A typical day's ride will be 70-80 km.
3. Jozi2Kozi 4 sho - this is for those who don't have the time but still want to enjoy this part of our wonderful country by taking part in a four-night, three-day ride from Ithala Game Reserve to Kosi Bay, in either of the above mentioned categories.

For further information and entry details visit www.jozi2kozi.co.za.

Outback: An area outside the main urban Jungle. locations that are comparatively more remote than those areas named "the bush". Beyond the back and beyond. Baie. Baie Ver! African Outback. way beyond Hot-as-Hell. You will not see me for weeks. no cell phone. even satellite phones battle here.

The Story so far: I finally persuaded the missus that we needed a 4x4, not totally convinced however but she could see the benefits of reduced costs for holidays (yeah right!, I'm a good salesman), going to far away places, exploring the outback, the unknown, (yes I know its only Kosi Bay for fishing).

And now, the kit, the accessories, the things that matter the most. I know that I had to "invest in the best" - get stuff that would last me over the lifetime of "matilda", my Hilux DC4x4, so I shopped around and the most sound advice I got from a number of outlets was to buy African Outback.

They have a range of solidly built, no comebacks, quality products, tried and tested for African outback conditions. I went into my favourite 4x4 outlet and low and behold, they had all the items that I wanted on display, Roofracks, Spare Wheel carriers cubby to secure the cash and other valuables, Long range tank, roller drawer and fridge slider, the guys were great, no waiting, booked the vehicle in for fitment and presto!

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THE IDEA OF TOURING A PIECE OF AFRICA ON A MOTORCYCLE WILL GET BOTH BIKERS AND NON-BIKERS EXCITED, AND HAS MADE IT ON TO MANY A BUCKET LIST. EXPLORING THE ROADS LESS TRAVELLED, WITH ONLY BASIC SUPPLIES, IS A TOTAL MENTAL ESCAPE, AND FOR SOME REASON A BORDER POST QUITE LITERALLY BECOMES A GATEWAY TO ANOTHER WORLD, AWAKENING EVEN THE MOST DORMANT OF ADVENTURERS OUT THERE. OUR NINE-DAY TRIP TOOK US THROUGH SEROWE, THE MAKGADIKGADI PANS, GWETA, MAUN, THE CAPRIVI, KASANE, VICTORIA FALLS, NATA, AND FRANCISTOWN. THIS IS OUR HUMBLE STORY ...

DAY 1 - PRETORIA TO KHAMA RHINO SANCTUARY (670 KM)

It was with high spirits that we met up at a garage in Pretoria. Our group of four consisted of Renier on his GS 1150, De Vos riding a GS 1200 Adventure, my brother Jacques on his faithful 650 Dakar, and myself on a F800 GS. We left at midday, hitting the N1 North in the direction of the Martins Drift border post. This was supposed to be the uneventful part of the trip, but just before Ellisras I had an intimate encounter with a newly compacted section of road that was still under construction. Luckily, the crash bars protected the body of the bike and there were no mechanical issues. After taking a few pictures, throwing back a quick shot of my brother's sherry for the shock and cracking a few jokes, we were back on the road.

Arriving at the border post late that afternoon, we completed the paperwork and then exchanged our Rands for Pulas. We left in darkness, jokingly reflecting back on the promise we'd made to each other to not drive during the night. Passing through Serowe, we arrived safely at the main gate of Khama Rhino Sanctuary around 9 p.m. However, our relief was short lived and our day far from over when we discovered almost 2 km of deep sandy roads separating us from the camp site. The guys, who had been to Tanzania on bikes, later told me that this was the toughest sand section they'd ever come across. At 11 p.m. we finally set up camp, devoured a few rat packs, and celebrated the end of the first day with a glass of well-deserved whiskey and some cigars. ▶







DAY 2 - KHAMA TO KUBU ISLAND, MAKGADIKGADI PANS (250 KM)

Tackling the 2 km of sandy roads back to the gate in daylight was still tough, but apart from a few minor falls we got through it rather quickly. At the gate we met up with a representative of the Khama Rhino Sanctuary and handed over several 'Stop Rhino Poaching' stickers and rubber arm bands, as part of our efforts to support the anti-poaching cause.

Back on firm tarmac, we left Khama, passed through the small village of Letlhakane, and made our way towards the Makgadikgadi Pans. We were looking forward to driving on the salt flats, but this was not to be as the pans were surrounded by a very challenging belt of sand. Once again we battled to get the bikes through and reached the edge of the pans thoroughly tired, tested, and dehydrated. As the sand gave way to more manageable rocky roads, we chased the setting sun to Kubu Island.

UPON ARRIVAL, WE WERE GREETED BY A MASSIVE BAOBAB TREE AND SURROUNDED BY JAW-DROPPING SCENERY. THIS PLACE TRULY IS MAGICAL, AS WELL AS HUMBLING, AND TAKES YOUR BREATH AWAY.

Unfortunately Kubu Island has no running water; a commodity we were desperately short of. After making a plan, we set up camp next to some mammoth baobab trees and reflected on another surprisingly tough yet amazing day.

DAY 3 - KUBU ISLAND TO GWETA (131 KM)

After packing up, we set out to explore the pans surrounding the island. Driving on the flat sections is quite exhilarating, but you have to be careful because right beneath the dry, cracked surface lurks a wet and slippery layer of clay.

Our next stop was Gweta, which meant passing through the sand belt surrounding the pans once more. It was 120 km of hell, full stop! We all came off our bikes at one stage or another; Renier broke his pannier, while De Vos damaged his engine mounting and also tried his hand at climbing a tree with his 1200 GS ☹. My bike had to be cut out of a fence after a mishap with a sand trap.

We had planned to sleep in Maun, but it was late and we didn't want to drive at night, so we opted to stay in Gweta, at Planet Baobab. On the way there I noticed that my bike couldn't accelerate beyond 60 km/h. It was a concerning discovery, but one that would have to wait until the next day. On arrival, we plunged into the pool, ordered supper, and rehydrated. Feeling more human, we turned our attention to the damaged bikes. Donning our headlamps, we made some 'bushveld' maintenance repairs using cable ties, super glue, Pratley steel, and, of course, duct tape. ►

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DAY 4 - GWETA TO MAUN (600 KM)

After breakfast we solved the acceleration problem on my bike by making a few quick adjustments to the clutch cable. Setting off, we continued north to the Caprivi, via Maun, but Murphy was not done with us yet. Approximately 116 km outside of Maun my rear tyre deflated due to the tube rupturing. Just then a group of friendly locals stopped and offered to help us patch up the tyre. After a two-hour battle we finally hit the road once more, but just 12 km further the tyre went flat again. By now the sun was starting to set and we were in the middle of nowhere, so we pulled the bikes out of sight and set up camp. Just then a bakkie stopped and offered to take us back to Maun, but not even 15 km later the bakkie overheated, due to a cracked radiator; it was going nowhere! Eventually we found a second bakkie and arrived in Maun at 3 a.m. It had been a very long and frustrating day, and the comedy of problems had caused a definite sense of humour failure in the group. So it was with great relief that we checked into Sedia Hotel's camping grounds.

DAY 5 - MAUN (0 KM) / CAPRIVI (550 KM)

The tyre problem was a big one, so we decided that Renier and De Vos would continue to the Caprivi, while my brother and I stayed in Maun to resolve the tyre issue. By lunch time it appeared as though we had a workable solution, so we discussed our plan of action over lunch and opted to stay in Maun for another night and rest a bit. We planned to go for a drive later that afternoon, only to discover that my tyre was once again deflated! It seemed to be a case study in Murphy's Law. I called the local tyre supplier and made arrangements to have the tyre fixed early the next morning.

DAY 6 - MAUN TO KASANE (603 KM) AND NGEPI LODGE TO KASANE (480 KM)

As soon as the tyre was fitted, we left for Kasane, via Gweta and Nata, fighting strong winds all the way. Nearing Kasane, the barren, dry landscape that had surrounded us since day two slowly started to give way to slightly greener vegetation, and afforded us our first elephant sightings of the trip. Elephants are beautiful and majestic, but the over population of this species has wrecked havoc on the area's vegetation. It's an unfortunate and sad sight to see. We arrived in Kasane just before sunset and re-joined the others at the luxurious Chobe Safari Lodge.

DAY 7 - KASANE TO VICTORIA FALLS AND BACK (200 KM)

Knowing that Zimbabwe charged a ridiculous fee for vehicles entering the country, we only took two bikes to minimise costs. After crossing the border we proceeded to the Victoria Falls, to start our day of white river rafting.

As it was the end of the dry season, the river's levels were low and therefore perfect for one big and wet adrenaline-filled adventure! The only downside was the climb back out of the gorge. After a day of superb rafting, we returned to Chobe Safari Lodge.

DAY 8 - KASANE TO MARTINS DRIFT BORDER (800 KM)

We left Kasane early and proceeded to Nata. After stopping in Francistown for lunch, we pushed on towards the border, checking in at Kwa Nokeng Lodge. For the first time during the trip we had a camp site with grass ... it was heaven!

DAY 9 - MARTINS DRIFT TO PRETORIA AND JOHANNESBURG (480 KM)

Back in South Africa, we came to appreciate how lucky we are to stay in this wonderful country. And although our trip had turned out to be far more challenging than anticipated, it was a great experience and one that we'll always remember.

I would like to thank our sponsors; Adventure Inc for supplying some fantastic Sea to Summit and Buff products, and Outdoor Foods for providing the delicious, convenient, and ready-to-eat food packs. Thanks guys, we really appreciated your support!

And now if you'll excuse me, I have to deal with the small matter of repairing the damage to my bike. My insurance company is going to love me. •

Related articles:

- Minsking Through Vietnam (Issue 19, p. 26)
- Touring Tales Through Botswana and Namibia (Issue 12, p.28)
- Old Faithful Discovers Botswana and Namibia, part 1 (Issue 13, p.20)

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For more information on the sites we visited and our partners on the trip, follow the links below:

Stop Rhino Poaching: www.stoprhinopoaching.com

Adventure Inc: www.adventureinc.co.za

Outdoor Foods: outdoorfoods.co.za

Khama Rhino Sanctuary - Serowe:

www.khamarhinosanctuary.com

Kubu Island - Makgadikgadi Pans: www.kubuisland.com

(20° 53' 44 S / 25° 49' 25 E)

Planet Baobab - Gweta: www.planetbaobab.co/

Sedia Hotel - Maun: www.sedia-hotel.com

Ngepi Lodge: www.ngepicamp.com

Chobe Safari Lodge - Kasane: www.chobesafarilodge.com

(17° 47' 45 S / 25° 02' 40 E)

Shearwater River Rafting: www.shearwatervictoriafalls.com

Kwa Nokeng Lodge (on border): www.kwanokeng.com

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(051) 448 0993 **Western Cape:** Eddy 2 Race, Brackenfell 0861 250 300 **Mpumalanga:** Nelspruit ATV
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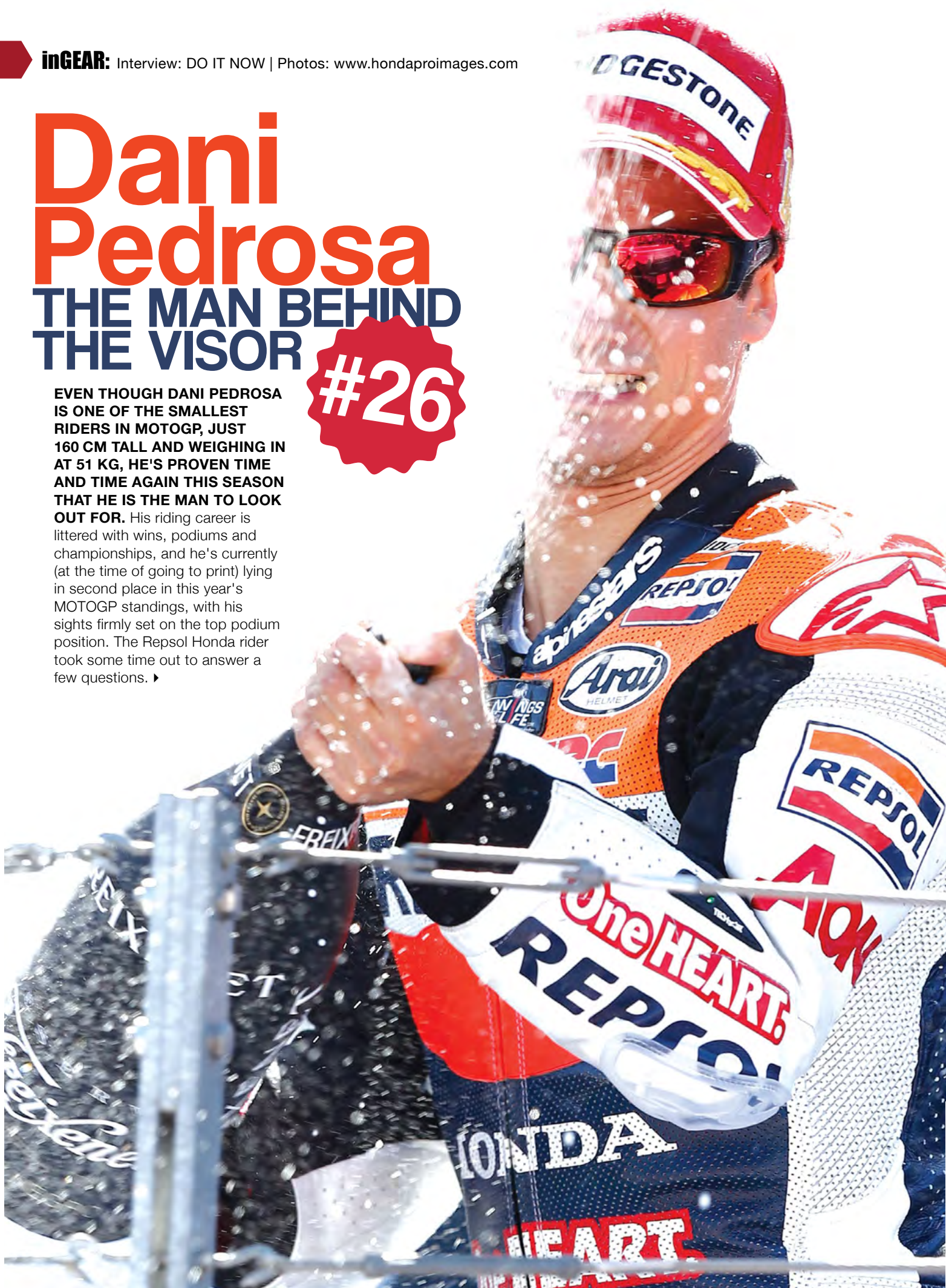


Dani Pedrosa

THE MAN BEHIND THE VISOR

#26

EVEN THOUGH DANI PEDROSA IS ONE OF THE SMALLEST RIDERS IN MOTOGP, JUST 160 CM TALL AND WEIGHING IN AT 51 KG, HE'S PROVEN TIME AND TIME AGAIN THIS SEASON THAT HE IS THE MAN TO LOOK OUT FOR. His riding career is littered with wins, podiums and championships, and he's currently (at the time of going to print) lying in second place in this year's MOTOGP standings, with his sights firmly set on the top podium position. The Repsol Honda rider took some time out to answer a few questions. ▶



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Q&A WITH DANI PEDROSA

Q: 2012 is turning out to be a great season for you. What do you attribute your success to; the new bike or have you found some extra motivation?

A: In racing everything counts. We have a good bike, the transition from 800 cc to the new 1,000 cc bike has been very positive and we did a good job in winter with the bike. I am healthy, and I've had no injuries to recover from for the first time in a long period. I was able to prepare myself physically and the season started out ok. We have been able to reach a good level from the beginning and have kept the results consistent; winning more races in the second half of the season.

Q: Ever considered SBK?

A: No, I've never thought about racing in another championship other than this one.

Q: What will you do after MotoGP?

A: It's too early to say. I've signed another two-year contract with HRC to race for the Repsol Honda Team. I feel good and I think I'm in the best time of my career, so I have no thoughts about the future yet. I like to take things step by step. You never know how you will feel when you retire. Maybe I want to be connected to this world (MotoGP) and help kids, like Alberto Puig did with me, or just leave and start a completely new life. I've haven't thought too seriously about it yet.

Q: Most riders move from team to team as soon as their contract is up, yet you have remained with Honda from day one. Why?

A: I've been with Honda for my whole racing career, and I'm very proud of it. I have had other options to move, and the team has also had the option to take on other riders; it's normal. But at the end of the day, Honda and I have stayed together for so many years because we wanted to; it's been the best option for both. I'm perhaps one of the riders with the longest history with Honda and it makes me feel very proud.

Q: You've had teammates come and go in the Repsol garage, who have you enjoyed riding with most and why?

A: I would say Casey (Stoner). He's been the strongest teammate and also the best one. We respect each other a lot and push each other to the maximum on the track, and this is very good for the team.

Q: Alberto Puig, your manager, has been with you since the start of your GP career. Do you have any other mentors or people you look up to?

A: I've had some other people in the team help me to grow as a racer, but Alberto is my one and only mentor.

Q: Would you change anything in terms of your profession?

A: Sure, I would change some things, as I guess everybody would do in their own job. But I enjoy racing, this is my life and my passion. Sometimes I feel that the championship has somehow lost the balance between racing and promotion.

Q: Any plans of moving from two to four wheels?

A: I like cars, but not to drive competitively. I have had some experiences as a co-driver with some experienced world rally car racers and really enjoyed it, but it's just for fun.

Q: In your everyday life, do you get around on a motorbike or car?

A: Living in Switzerland, I usually use a car to get around in, especially in winter because it's very cold there. Sometimes I use my scooter bike, weather permitting.



Q: Besides motorcycling, what are your other passions and/or interests, and what do you do to relax?

A: Another sport I enjoy a lot is windsurfing in summer time. It's a similar kind of feeling that you get on the bike. I also love going to the cinema to watch some good movies or just have fun with my friends, who I sometimes miss during the season.

Q: What is your favourite food and refreshment?

A: Everything my mum cooks, I would say! I like pasta, a good steak, and fish; a mix of everything. I drink water, but I've discovered the wine culture recently and I also enjoy it when I have a relaxed dinner at home with friends.

Q: What is your favourite place to visit on holiday and why?

A: I don't have much time for holidays in the summer break, so I don't like to take long flights. I just want to relax and any place next to the sea is good for me.

Q: What message do you have for young aspiring riders?

A: I would say to them that they have to feel passionate about racing and enjoy the sport. Talent is very important, but you also need passion and hard work to reach a good level and survive in a very competitive world like this.

Profile

NAME	Daniel 'Dani' Pedrosa Ramal
BORN	29 September 1985 in Sabadell, Catalonia, Spain
NATIONALITY	Spanish
NICKNAME	None
WEIGHT	51 kg
HEIGHT	160 cm (5 ft. 3 in)
MOTOGP TEAM	Repsol Honda Team
BIKE	RC212V
NUMBER	26
WEBSITE	danipedrosa.com

#26

EARLY DAYS

Dani's passion for motorcycles began, like many of the top current riders, when he was a small child. At the tender age of four he rode his first motorcycle, an Italjet 50 with side-wheels. He received his first racing bike at six, which he used to race with his friends.

Dani's first taste of real racing was at the age of nine, when he entered the Spanish Minibike Championship and ended his debut season in second place, scoring his first podium finish in the second race of the season. The following year, he entered the same championship, but health problems prevented him from improving his results and he ended the season in third position. By the age of 12, Dani had won the national championship in his native Spain, but a lack of funds almost curtailed his promising career before it had begun. However, a search for fresh racing talent in Spain, headed by former Grand Prix star Alberto Puig, gave the youngster an opportunity to prove himself on a bigger stage, and he grasped it with both hands.

Dani made his professional debut at 16, and at just 19 he became the youngest person ever to win the 250cc Championship. In 2004, he went on to successfully defended his title and become the youngest double world champion. But Pedrosa wasn't done earning 'youngest' records. After taking the step up to the MotoGP class in 2006, Pedrosa became the youngest Spaniard to ever win a MotoGP race, and the second youngest of any nationality. Pedrosa earned his first MotoGP win in just his fourth attempt, at 20. And since then, he's never looked back! •

➔ Related article:

- Is Time Running Out For Valentino Rossi (Digital article, September '12)

GET BLOWN AWAY IN MAURITIUS

IN 1974, LARRY YATES' SURFING MOVIE, 'FORGOTTEN ISLAND OF SANTOSHA', WAS RELEASED AND HIGHLIGHTED A BREAK AND PERFECT 8-10 FOOT TUBES IN TAMARIN BAY, MAURITIUS. EVEN THOUGH THIS SPOT HAS BEEN SURFED SINCE THE EARLY 1960s, THE EXOTIC IMAGES OF THIS REMOTE ISLAND GETAWAY SPURRED MANY OTHER SURFERS TO DISCOVER THIS NOW WORLD-FAMOUS LOCATION. WITH GOOD SWELLS AND STRONG SOUTH-EASTERLY TRADE WINDS, IT ALSO DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR THE WINDSURFERS TO FIND THE ISLAND. TODAY, MAURITIUS IS KNOWN AS ONE OF THE BEST KITESURFING AND WINDSURFING DESTINATIONS ON THE PLANET.

I first visited Mauritius on a family holiday in 1996. We stayed in Blue Bay, in the south-east region, as we'd been told the wind and water sports were good. I was a keen sailor already, and this trip gave me the opportunity to discover diving, skiing, and wake boarding. But what I really wanted to try was windsurfing. After two weeks I had only experienced a small part of what the island had to offer, but I was hooked. Sixteen years later I returned to explore more of this windsurfing paradise.

Most of the good windsurfing spots are in the privately owned areas, so if you want easy access to the water you'll need to book accommodation on the beach you plan to sail. I recommend renting a car and staying in a more central location. For wave sailing, I'd stay somewhere in the south-west region of Le Morne. For freeride/slalom, I'd recommend the south-east region around Pointe D'esny, however, if the noise of overhead aircraft bugs you then head north towards Poste Lafayette.

Although I didn't get to sail all the following spots mentioned, the guys I stayed with put these sites top of the menu. ►



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RIVIERE DU REMPART REGION IN THE NORTH AND NORTH-EAST PARTS

CAP MALHEUREUX is a small fishing village, located on the island's northern tip, with a public beach. The area has a few coral reefs, so test the waters out carefully or get advice from the Sinbad Kite School. There are a couple of wave spots as well, but be aware of the outer reefs as most are not passable at low or medium tides.

ANSE LA RAIE is approximately two kilometres from Cap Malheureux. This lagoon is almost two kilometres in length and can be accessed at the Anse la Raie public beach or the public beach in front of the Ministry of Sports Youth Centre. The lagoon has a few shallow areas and some wave spots on the outer reef.

ROCHES NOIRES is further down the north-eastern coast, and with a predominantly side-onshore wind it's one of the biggest lagoons for flat-water blasting. Access to the water is difficult due to all the private properties on the beach, but there are some public beaches adjacent to the concrete jetties.

FLACQ REGION IN THE EAST

POSTE LAFAYETTE has a great public beach that's ideal for launching both kitesurfers and windsurfers. The beach is wide and the bay can be sailed all the way to the other side, but stay clear of the strong currents going out to the reef from the main channel!

BELLE MARE is very popular with lots of hotels and activities on and off the water. The beach is quite big and conditions are typically side-onshore, with long runs along the shoreline, but be aware of the sharp 'stag horn' type coral along the outer reef.

PALMAR is similar to Belle Mare, except the lagoon is not as wide. There is public access from the southern side of the bay, but it's a bit trickier for kites due to the narrower beach. The stretch to Poste Lafayette is about 10 km and makes for a great long-distance ride.

TROU D'EAU DOUCE is one of the island's special spots. Access is best from the public beach's northern side, but rather hire a boat and cruise over to Île aux Cerfs Island where there are many small white sandy beaches to launch from. The lagoon is fairly big, with onshore conditions and the possibility to ride a super-smooth speed track just inside the breaking surf, but avoid it at low tide. From here you can ride a marathon 24 km all the way to Blue Bay.

GRAND PORT REGION IN THE SOUTH EAST

POINTE D'ESNY/BLUE BAY is situated on the south-eastern point of the island. It's one of the clearest and biggest lagoons on island. Side-onshore conditions and great riding along the outer reef make this site very popular. Beach access can be problematic unless you rent one of the numerous private residences, or enter via one of the two access points.

SAVANNE REGION IN THE SOUTH

RIVIERE DES GALETS is a little peninsula next to a river mouth, west of Surinam. It offers good surf conditions when the wind dies down, and kiting or windsurfing when it picks up. The wind can be tricky near the shore, but the wave on the reef is pretty radical; fast and unforgiving, and should only be ridden at high tide.

RIVIERE NOIRE REGION IN THE SOUTH WEST

LE MORNE lies on the south-western tip of the island. It's probably the most commercial and visited area on the island, and a popular bathing beach. It has a comparatively small lagoon, but good wind and a public beach on the point. If you're a skilled sailor, you'll have one of the best wave rides of your life here. Riders should familiarise themselves with the dangers of the current and sudden drops in wind pressure.

LA PRAIRIE is the upwind lagoon in Le Morne. It is a large but shallow lagoon, with some urchin fields and big patches of stag horn corals. Darker patches should be approached with care, and the downwind rides are fantastic.

LITTLE REEF is the inside reef and the safest for wave riding with its seaweed covered rocks and minimal corals, but it can make a pretty hollow wave at low tide.

MANAWA is the wave to the south east, just past the main channel. It's an easy and popular reef break, with relatively deep water (1.5 m). The wave runs quite slowly, allowing for easy cutbacks and deep bottom turns. To get there you have to sail over the channel where the current flows with the wind, resulting in almost no apparent wind. A bigger board and sail is recommended to carry you through the lighter parts.

CHAMEAUX essentially starts at the channel and runs north towards One Eye. It's probably the ultimate in wave riding for windsurfers and kitesurfers. In a solid 3 m swell from the south east, you can pick up a 150 m fast and hollow ride with good sections for aials. However, the hollow waves make it shallow on the reef and only 50 cm deep on high tide.

ONE EYE is just the Chameaux wave breaking further north. Many windsurfers ride here, but the northern half of the break is reserved for surfers. The break ends in a narrow channel with a strong current that will suck out any passing objects or persons. The wave is super smooth and hollow, and gets really big, but always keep one eye on the next wave as it's often much bigger and breaking earlier. Localism is strong here, so be careful.

SO IF WINDSURFING IN MAURITIUS APPEALS TO YOU, THEN HERE'S A FEW TIPS TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR STAY ON THE ISLAND.



WHEN TO GO

Windsurfing travel guides recommend good wind from June to October, but locals will tell you June and July are better, and a bit less crowded. The winter months bring a pretty consistent wind, around 15 to 20 knots, with it never going much over 25 knots. However, the wind here doesn't carry the same power as the cold, dense air of Cape Town, so you'll need to upsize your equipment.

WHAT TO TAKE

Typical windsurfing wave equipment for someone around 80 kg is an 80 to 90L board and 5.3 to 5.7 sq.m sails. For freeride or slalom, you'll need a 100 to 120L board and 6.2 to 8.6 sq.m sails. Renting equipment makes travel to Mauritius easier, but you run the risk of not getting what you want.

BEWARE

A few things to be aware of are:

- Coral abounds in some areas, so bring a pair of slim fitting booties to protect your feet, and leave your favourite race fins behind!
- The current can be quite strong in the channels, near the outer ring reef, and I've heard stories of people being sucked out to sea. Do some research before heading out. Many regulars recommend a GPS PLB (Personal Locating Beacon) and/or carrying a two-way radio.
- When it's cloudy and rainy the wind can be unpredictable, so rather than risk a 6 m wave on the reef or one of those channels with no wind, come in.
- There have been cases of friction between locals and visitors, so have respect for other people in the water or avoid the waves on the weekend when they'll be riding their home spot. There's no localism around the flat water areas, and the locals would be stoked to have someone sail with them!

AFTER SPENDING JUST A FEW DAYS IN MAURITIUS, I DISCOVERED MORE THAN I HAD DURING THE TWO WEEKS OF MY FIRST VISIT, 16 YEARS AGO. THIS FANTASTIC ADVENTURE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT MY HOST; CHRISTOPHER TYACK, AND MY SPONSORS; POINT-7 AND THE MAURITIUS TOURISM PROMOTION AUTHORITY. •

Related articles:

- Malibu Classic, All Windsurfing Action (Digital article, September '12)
- Pozo Izquierdo, a Windsurfing Mecca (Issue 19, p. 44)
- Langebaan Down Wind Dash (Issue 16, p. 64)

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FOR MORE INFORMATION ON MAURITIUS WIND- AND KITESURFING, VISIT THESE SITES:

- Indian Ocean Surf Companies www.mauritiusurf.com
- Magic Seaweed www.magicseaweed.com
- WannaSurf www.wannasurf.com

WINDSURFING SCHOOLS:

- Mistral Centre, Le Morne - www.club-mistral.com
- Sinbad Kite School - www.sindbad.mu/

EQUIPMENT RENTAL:

- Mistral Centre - www.club-mistral.com

SURF SHOPS (INDIAN OCEAN SURF COMPANIES):

- La Gaulette Surf Store
- Mahebourg Surf Shop

A White-water Christmas



My favourite thing about South Africa is the fact that our country isn't flat, which means there are loads of great places to go to, to kayak and have fun on our flowing waterways and rivers. And living in a summer-rainfall region means that we can look forward to the December holidays being a little wetter and the water a little wilder.

Before we look at my favourite places for a December paddle session, there are two websites that you should get to know as they'll help you find the most water. The first is www.weatherphotos.co.za, and this site has all kinds of short- to long-term forecasts for where the most rain is expected or has been falling. The other one is www.dwaf.gov.za/hydrology, and here you should look at the unverified data, which lists the various river stations and daily flow of the different rivers in an area. It might take you a couple of minutes to figure out which drainage region covers what rivers, but once you have that sorted you'll be able to see what the rivers you might go to or are planning to visit are doing on a daily basis. The station read-outs are in cubic metres per second, so just remember that each river is different, for example, a 100 cumecs on the Vaal River may be brilliant, but the same amount of water in the Blyde Canyon is deadly. ▶



Paddler: Andrew Kellett. Photographer: Celliers Kruger



Paddlers: James and David Scriman. Photographer: Cornelia Scriman



Paddlers: Andrew Kellett and Hugh du Preez. Photographer: Celliers Kruger



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Tugela,
Umkomaas
Rivers

Great
Usutu
River

A White-water Christmas

Now that you know where to look for rain and water, deciding on where to go for a summer session that paddlers of all skill levels can enjoy is a little trickier because there are quite a few to choose from. If you are heading to KwaZulu-Natal, then my top choices would be the Tugela, Umzimkulu, and Umkomaas Rivers. All these rivers have different sections, but the more accessible stretches have commercial operations on them that make getting to and from these sites easier. Reputable operators in the area include Dr. Gustav Greffrath through IchyFeet SA, Rich Domleo from Trailblazers or Nino Cloete who runs Kayak Freestyle. They can be contacted via their websites or on Facebook.

If you are more north, towards Mpumalanga or the Limpopo, then my top three rivers would be the Blyde, Olifants, and Sabie Rivers. The Blyde is quite tricky to get to as it is situated in the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve and under the guardianship of the Parks Board, and you are only allowed to paddle it on pre-organised trips with the Blyde Adventure Camp. This river will always be my favourite place, but the story behind that is a long one. To arrange a paddle on any of these rivers, you can contact the Induna Adventures boys and chat to the owner Jaco Lubbe, or myself. Another fantastic little river that has grown in popularity over the last couple of years is the Steelpoort River, but beware of this little guy on anything above 20 cumeecs.

The last destination I would highly recommend is the wonderful Kingdom of Swaziland. Once here, you will want to head on over to Swazi Trails and join them on the commercial section of the Great Usutu River. Speak to Shane and Darron Raw, as they are a mine of information and more than happy to lend a helping hand to get you to the different sections of the Usutu. But don't be fooled by what you get on the commercial section as the rest of the Usutu is a notch up. The two best sections here, and the easiest in terms of access, are the Dwaleni and Bhunya, but if the rivers are full then they will be rough and tough, so make sure you've packed your 'big-girl panties'.

Something else I would suggest is to join the Google group 'Whitewater Tangent'. This is the biggest communication platform for kayakers in the country, and everything kayaking-related gets posted there, from people looking for paddling buddies, to making a trip happen, as well as gear, events, training, well like I said, everything paddling related comes through the Tangent.

Ok, so you know where to look for water, which rivers offer the most joy without major headaches in terms of access, and how to find anything kayaking related. But December is also Christmas time, a time of giving and receiving new toys wrapped in funny paper. So my top choices for a little something under the Christmas tree are:

- The new WRSI Trident helmet has uber style and provides top-notch protection.
- First Ascent's X-tech paddling top is not only super comfy and hard working, it has built-in sun protection too!
- FiveFingers Komodo Sports are killer.
- And if you have a big tree, then take a look at the new Fluid Bazooka creek boat, the ultimate creeking kayak. It has enough edge to help catch that last eddy before the waterfall, and is probably Fluid's best designed hull shape ever to help you punch through the big holes and surface safely, smoothly, and in style from the bottom of your first waterfall run!

Travel safe over the holidays and remember,
walk fast - drive slow. •

➡ Related articles:

- Getting your Groove Back for Summer (Issue 19, p 100)
- Grav it up at the Gravity Adventure Festival (Digital article, September '12)
- Stretch it to get it (Issue 16, p. 100)



dinFO box 

All I Want for Christmas ...

Here's our kayaker's gift guide with a few more winning ideas that will work for any single- or double-bladed paddler on your list.

- **Camera bag** - Getting to that perfect paddling destination isn't enough these days. Now you have to photograph it, take a video and blog about it, and that means you've got a heap of equipment to move about. The Pelican Case, especially the 1200, is a great all rounder for putting anything and everything in, plus you get a lifetime guarantee. For a camera-only bag that rocks, try Watershed's Ocoee or Chattooga.
- **Sunglasses** - The SeaSpecs polarised lenses and contoured shape keeps the glare at bay so that you can see clearly on the brightest of days. They also have the best retention straps on the market, as other similar glasses tend to have bulkier straps that create some comfort issues when worn under your helmet.
- **General protection bag** - The WXtex dry bag range is still one of the best all-round dry bag ranges, but tricky to get hold of. Luckily for us, First Ascent will soon be releasing their own dry bag range, which I have poked, stretched, and roughed up, and like all things from Lizzard it has been performance tested and performs like a Siamese fighting hamster on Redbull. It will keep your lunch, torch, sleeping bag, and socks safe and completely dry, and protected from the elements.
- **Snacks** - When you feel like a little snack on the water, satisfy your hunger pangs with some rock-solid peanuts and raisins. These natural munchies contain protein, sugar, and salt, and are top notch. Biltong is great too.
- **Water bottle** - What's the one item that always gets lost and needs replacing? No holiday gift item is more needed than a good water bottle. The Nalgene range is now available in South Africa and they are simply the best.
- **Headlamp** - Ever lost a headlamp to a rainstorm, or had it crushed in your dry bag? The Petzl Tikka Plus is tough as nails and handles wetness without too many short circuits. I wouldn't go scuba diving with it though, but I have run around in the rain for hours with mine and it kept going as long as I could.
- **Hat** - The First Ascent Fresco cap is my favourite, but if you are worried about burning your top (especially for those of us who are endowed with less hair) then the Dundee Sun Hat is a beastie with built-in SPF 50 protection and indispensable on a sunny day.



AGAINST KOHLEK KEEPS PADDLING FOR SMILES THE ODDS, NAMIBIA TO MOZAMBIQUE BY SEA

“Success is not measured by what you accomplish, but by the opposition you have encountered, and the courage with which you have maintained the struggle against overwhelming odds.” Orison Swett Marden

South Africa is blessed with many big-hearted individuals who have done incredible things for the causes they believe in. But not many can say they have actually put their life on the line for it. Richard Kohler is one such good Samaritan who has looked death in the face and come out smiling.

For Richard Kohler, the ocean is an adventure waiting to be explored! Born in 1970, Richard started sailing at the tender age of six. With a love for the ocean and adventure, his paddling career kicked off in 2000, and he achieved his Provincial colours in 2004 and 2010. Richard's paddling career continued to flourish and he was asked to try out for SA's Americas Cup team, and went on to sail for the Americas Cup team 'Shosholoza' in 2006-2007. He then added the 2010 WP Vets Presidents Trophy to his trophy cabinet, and has completed four Port Elizabeth to East London Surf Ski Challenges, as well as six Berg River Marathons. Richard also has a soft spot for the youth and has founded a number of development programmes, including the successful Milnerton Canoe Club programme.

In December last year, Richard launched from a beach in Mozambique with aim of being the first solo-surfski paddler to paddle the entire 3,600 km South African coastline between Mozambique and Namibia; he was unsupported at sea, but had a land-based team assisting with daily beach landings and surf condition advice. With this journey he had his sights firmly set on raising R1.1 million for Miles for Smiles, which would be used to finance the reconstructive surgery of 200 children born with cleft palates or lips, enabling them to smile for the first time. But then everything that could go wrong went wrong ...

His worst nightmare came true on day three while surfing down a wave; the ski was flung forwards and Richard was thrown into the water. "I knew instantly it was a shark," he said. "I was utterly amazed at the force with which it hit me," said Richard. The specially reinforced ski was still in one piece, but the rudder had been smashed forward with such energy that the whole shaft fitting had been ripped off its mountings, tearing a hole in the bottom of the hull. "I was about 30 km into the planned 70 km paddle, and about 4 km out to sea when it happened," he said. Heading back to the beach, he managed to source some duct tape and slow the intake of water. Rattled and more than a little anxious he tentatively put out to sea again, but had to return to shore twice more to drain the ski. Then about 10 km from Cape Vidal the rudder blade totally detached from the shaft, leaving the ski with no steering at all. Using his leg to try and keep straight, Richard paddled back to the shore once more to empty his craft. Unable to contact his support team, nor could he walk the 24 km to Cape Vidal, he was left with no alternative but to put out to sea once more. By chance, Richard came across ski-boat fishermen who lent him repair materials, and he eventually limped into Cape Vidal, completing his planned 70 km haul.



Within a week of getting started the KwaZulu-Natal coastline swallowed him up, worked him over and unceremoniously spat him out as a buckled man on a remote beach at the Amatikulu River Mouth. But despite the battering headwinds, the shark attack and punishment his body was taking, he kept going and gingerly set out once more.

However, disaster struck for a third time. Three weeks into his journey, at Winklespruit, Richard was robbed of all the expedition equipment, including safety gear, navigational equipment, radios, cameras, irreplaceable photographs and video footage, and computers ... and he couldn't continue without it. For all intent purposes this was it for Richard, who had given it more than his best shot.

Down but not out, Richard was not ready to throw in the towel. "I have no intention of giving up!" he said in his quiet, resolute way, **"With the support I have received from family, friends, and people I have never met, I am more determined than ever to paddle the entire 3,600 km South African coastline. Together, where each of us do what we can to make this expedition work, we will give the gift of a smile to 200 children."**

Saturday 14 October 2012 was set as the relaunch date. However, the delivery of Richard's boat was delayed due to the truck driver's strikes, so he only launched from Alexander Bay at 08h00 on Sunday, 21 October 2012, where he paddled up to the Orange River Mouth, which marks the border of South Africa and Namibia, made a ceremonious U-turn and arrived back at Alexander Bay to overnight. He set off into the great blue yonder at sunrise on 23 October 2012, and plans to do an average of 30 km per day, with the aim of completing his journey in four months. •

➔ Related articles:

- Vet Books for Africa (Issue 14, p. 128)
- Riders Ride to Rescue Rhinos (Issue 14, p. 70)
- Running for Cheetahs (Issue 8, p. 22)

Paddling
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Smiles

NAMIBIA TO MOZAMBIQUE BY SEA

MILES FOR SMILES

The Cipla Miles for Smiles Foundation was formed to assist Operation Smile in creating awareness for the plight of children born with cleft lips and palates, and raise funds to perform corrective surgery on them. For every R5 500.00 donated to Operation Smile South Africa, they can facilitate corrective facial surgery on a child and give them their God-given right to a smile. With a simple operation of some 45 minutes, a child's life can be changed forever.

The foundation has a fundamental aim, to inspire and challenge individuals to go out and make a difference in the lives of those around them, by challenging themselves to achieve the impossible and by doing so, make a difference.

dinFO box ⓘ

Show your support by following Richard on Facebook (www.facebook.com/Paddlingforsmiles) or subscribe to the Paddling for Smiles newsletter (<http://ow.ly/eBcAu>)

If you would like to get behind Richard and Paddling for Smiles, and help 'give a smile back' to 200 children, a small donation can make all the difference in the world! To make a donation visit www.paddlingforsmiles.co.za and click on the 'donate' button at the top.



Mozambique Manta Coast

Having had the privilege of diving around the world, Laura and I keep a running scorecard of our top five dive sites. These obviously can change depending on our mood, our most recent holiday or time of the year. It is interesting to note that no matter where we dived last, the time of year, water temperature or what the currents were like, the east coast of Africa always features. In August this year Laura and I ventured north east, for our first experience of the renowned Manta Coast of Mozambique.

We left Johannesburg after work and made short work of the trip to the border, where we spent the night. The next day's torturous trip had us arrive at our destination 11 hours after setting out, which included two hours at the border and yo-yoing between the speed limits of 100 kph and 60 kph every couple of kilometres. More frustrating than the yo-yo driving was being pulled over by the Mozambique traffic police for doing 68 kph in a 60 zone - I was not impressed! All said and done, when Laura and I finally arrived at our destination of Jeff's Palm Beach Resort, in Guinjata Bay, we were exhausted, but extremely excited. We did not even unpack the car before heading down to the restaurant to grab a cold beer, a little 'R&R', and book a dive for the next morning.

When morning arrived we were treated to the magnificent setting of the lodge we were staying at. The palm-leaf thatched roofs of the bungalows peppered the dune, while the restaurant and dive shop sat right on the beach, boasting an 180-degree view of the coastline. The day was perfect, the sea magnificent, and there was not a breath of wind. Our dive was at the famed Manta Reef, and no sooner had we hit the water than the magic began. The topography and fish life was outstanding and Laura had a great opportunity to get a big sloppy kiss from a potato bass almost as big as her. Next a beautiful honeycomb moray darted from its hiding place in the coral and elegantly glided to the safety of a massive plate coral, just centimetres from where we watched. The reef lived up to its name and everything else became a lot less attractive as the first of five giant oceanic manta's glided overhead and into the cleaning station. The remainder of the dive was spent just enjoying the majesty of the world's largest rays as they circled. The excitement on the boat after the dive was epic, and we agreed that the holiday couldn't have gotten off to a better start.

Laura and I decided not to do a second dive that day, despite the excellent conditions, and rather joined an afternoon sea safari. Typically divers view sea safaris in a rather negative light, as why would you spend that amount of time on top of the water when you could be diving? But because the day was just so perfect, the thought of a two-hour cruise up and down the coast sounded brilliant, regardless of the 'safari' aspect. Needless to say the 'safari' part was not something to be taken lightly as the afternoon started off with a quick swim amongst a pod of very playful dolphins. When the dolphins tired of us we hopped back into the boat and continued down the coast, only to be treated to two humpback whales playing in the shallows off Paindane Beach. Laura and I were the first in the water and watched these magnificent creatures lolling in the water - and nearly got ourselves killed as one of them slapped its massive tail down just metres from us. This was our first-ever experience with humpback whales and we were so close that I couldn't get a decent photo - and you could not wipe the smile from our faces. ▶



Sunset at Zavora



Honey Comb Moray



Whale shark



Manta



Nudibranch



Gun Sling at High Noon



Hug a Bass



Content that the day could not get any better we lay on the pontoon of the rubber duck and enjoyed the warm spring sun. This didn't last long as our attention was quickly diverted to a massive greenback turtle swimming alongside the boat. Finally, but rather reluctantly, the skipper turned for home with a crew of very excited passengers. He headed for the backline and was almost immediately rewarded with the first of two whale shark sightings. We got into the water as quickly as possible and once again experienced one of the ocean's wonders at impossibly close quarters.

So with the ocean's 'big five' done and dusted, all in a single day, Laura and I were possibly the happiest people on earth and excited to see what the rest of the holiday could offer.

Unfortunately those stellar days are one in a million and the weather turned in the night to present us with a wild sea and turbulent wind for the morning of our second day. The remaining three days at Guinjata Bay were lovely despite the poor weather and lack of diving, and the friendly people we met at the lodge provided for lively conversation and great stories of diving around the world.

The next stop on our Manta Coast extravaganza was further south, at a more remote location called Zavora. Here African time takes on a new meaning, and is where an 08h30 dive is likely to only launch at 10h00. This is not a show-stopper though, as the people are friendly and the focus is on diving, with each outing consisting of a deep dive to around 30 metres and then a shallower dive at about 15 metres. Unfortunately, the weather did not improve dramatically so the surge was fairly strong and the visibility not fantastic.

With the 'negatives' out the way, I can honestly say that the dive sites at Zavora are some of the most beautiful I have ever dived. The underwater landscapes were varied and interesting, with coral gullies and rocky swim throughs, massive boulders, and complex coral diversity. The topography was really something to behold, and in better visibility holds the promise of millions of hidden secrets. Some of these secrets did show themselves and we were lucky enough to see some beautiful paperfish, a variety of brightly coloured nudibraches, of which one was the massively impressive Spanish dancer. Large potato bass and schools of kingfish augmented the variety of eels and colourful butterflyfish. These magnificent reefs were teeming with life, which made them truly memorable, but what made them exceptional and puts them into my top five (for the moment anyway) dive sites is that these reefs are prolific cleaning stations and of the six dives we did in Zavora we saw mantas on four and eagle rays on one - not bad for the Manta Coast.

So once again, after an experience to rival the best of Australia, Egypt, Indonesia, and Borneo, the Manta Coast really is part of a wonderful world. •

Related articles:

- Diving Bilene - the lesser-known Mozambican diving destination (Issue 19, p. 55)
- Marico Oog - a unique freshwater diving experience (Issue 18 p. 36)
- The Great Barrier Reef and Beyond - Australia Part 1 of 2 (Issue 14, p. 40)

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- The Manta Coast is great all-year round. Typically manta and whale shark sightings are better in the summer months, although a shift about two years ago has seen more and more mantas frequenting the reefs during the cooler months. Humpback whales frequent the area between June and October.
- The rainy season is typically between November and February.
- Manta Reef is accessible from Guinjata Bay, Coconut Bay, and the more famous Barra Lodge.
- I recommend an advanced qualification, as the currents and surge can prove tricky if you are unsure of how to handle yourself in those conditions.
- For diving in Guinjata Bay contact Johan or Mauritz at Jeff's Palm Resort - diving@jeffsmoz.com or www.jeffsmoz.com/diving.
- For diving in Zavora contact John at Moz divers - <http://mozdivers.com/>.
- Technical diving and training is available from Zavora, as the dive school is an IANTD school.
- A 'R&R' is a Rum and Raspberry drink made from local rum and Sparberry.



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ONE CAN HARDLY PICK UP A NEWSPAPER, MAGAZINE OR WATCH TV THESE DAYS WITHOUT SEEING OR HEARING SOME REFERENCE TO STRESS. SO WHY ALL THE SUDDEN FUSS AND FASCINATION? AFTER ALL, STRESS HAS BEEN AROUND SINCE ADAM AND EVE WERE EVICTED FROM THE GARDEN OF EDEN. IS IT BECAUSE THERE IS MUCH MORE STRESS TODAY?

Is it because the nature of contemporary stress is somehow different and more dangerous? Or is it because scientific research has increasingly confirmed the crucial role stress can play in causing and aggravating different disorders, and the diverse mechanisms of actions responsible for mediating its multitudinous effects?

The answer to these questions is a resounding yes!

Stress is the 'wear and tear' our bodies experience as we adjust to our continually changing environment; it affects us physically and emotionally and can create positive or negative feelings. As a positive influence, stress can help compel us to action, it can result in a new awareness and exciting new perspective. As a negative influence, it can result in feelings of distrust, rejection, anger, and depression, which in turn can lead to health problems such as headaches, an upset stomach, rashes, insomnia, ulcers, high blood pressure, heart disease, and strokes. With the death of a loved one, the birth of a child, a job promotion, or a new relationship, we experience stress as we readjust our lives. In adjusting to different circumstances, stress will help or hinder us depending on how we react to it.

Tai Chi (pronounced ti-chee) is sometimes described as 'meditation in motion'. Originally developed in China as a form of self-defence, this graceful form of exercise has existed for about 2,000 years. It's becoming increasingly popular around the world, both as a basic exercise programme and as a complement to other health-care methods. Health benefits include stress reduction, greater balance, muscular development/control and increased flexibility - especially for older adults.

When I began practising Tai Chi in 1990, what struck me was its power, or at least the promise of its power and healing benefits. I discovered there was nothing mystical or particularly esoteric about the power of Tai Chi. The benefits are immense and include improved coordination, circulation, posture, balance and well-being. Because Tai Chi's practised slowly and with a relaxed focus, the nervous system becomes calmer and so do you. This meditative effect gives you a clearer perspective mentally and in today's fast-paced world this is a huge resource. In fact, the stress-relieving attributes are one of the main reasons why people start Tai Chi, as it gives them a calm mind and real sense of physical, emotional and spiritual health and well-being.

Tai Chi started a long time ago, so it has had time to evolve into what we see today. The slow process of change that has happened to Tai Chi over the centuries is mirrored in the way it is practised, for example, at a meditative pace with no rush to complete its intricate and engrossing movements. The softness and flow makes you relax, but it's a rejuvenating kind of relaxation. At the end of a class, people are buzzing with Qi (life force), as the practise encourages your energy to flow, and tension and blockages just seem to dissolve away. It all sounds great, which it is, but you have to put a little effort in to get results. It's hard to get your head around the fact that something so graceful and elegant can be used for self-defence too. But then again there is an old Chinese saying that says, 'the best fighters never fight'. Therefore, if you have no enemies internally or externally, then there is no need for conflict.

The philosophy behind Tai Chi (Taoism) is really useful too and includes the theory that if you fight force with force any conflict will get worse. It teaches yielding and flexibility to overcome any situation, and can diffuse a situation leaving room for negotiation and dialogue. When you take something like this into your daily life then you have gained a distinct advantage. Yielding encourages listening, and when you listen you gain more information and it is easier to see where someone is coming from. In the workplace such a strategy would create less stress for everyone!

Part of the physiological aspect of Tai Chi includes the effect it has on our brain, lymphatic system and joints. Recent neurological research has found that Tai Chi encourages the brain to perform more effectively. This is partly due to the brain receiving more oxygenated blood (as the breathing technique in Tai Chi improves lung capacity and elasticity), but also because the meditative, calming effect of Tai Chi changes the brain's frequency from beta (active normal waking waves) to alpha (receptive between sleep and awake waves that are related to improved ability to learn and remember). The lymphatic system is partly responsible for detoxifying the blood and is stimulated by the gentle muscular work in Tai Chi. The soft, relaxed movements of Tai Chi massage the lymph nodes, thus improving their function and boosting the immune system. The joints of the body are often where aches and pains first creep in, so maintaining healthy, active joints is important at any age.

BECAUSE THE LOAD BEARING JOINTS OF THE BODY ARE KEPT IN STRONG ALIGNMENT THROUGHOUT TAI CHI AND ARE NEVER ABUSED NOR GREATLY IMPACTED UPON, THEIR HEALTH AND FUNCTION IS PROTECTED WHILST THE CIRCULATION OF BLOOD IN AND AROUND THE JOINTS IS INCREASED.

In the competitive marketplace, retention of quality employees is often determined by the scope of the compensation package each company extends. Numerous companies worldwide are now incorporating a 'Tai Chi break' to expose their employees to this therapeutic art, to improve performance. What makes it so popular is that there is no expensive outlay for equipment and no special workspace is necessary. It has been proven globally that employees become more productive when exposed to regular sessions. ▶



WHO IS TAI CHI FOR?

If you're trying to improve your general health, you may find Tai Chi helpful as part of your programme. It is generally safe for people of all ages and levels of fitness. Studies have shown that for older adults, Tai Chi can improve balance and reduce the risk of falls. Because the movements are low impact and put minimal stress on your muscles and joints, Tai Chi is appealing to many older adults. For these same reasons, if you have a condition such as arthritis or you're recovering from an injury, you may also find it useful.

Tai Chi can offer both physical and mental benefits no matter what your age. It's used to:

- Reduce stress
- Increase flexibility
- Improve muscle strength and definition
- Increase energy, stamina, and agility
- Increase feelings of well-being

Tai Chi hasn't been studied scientifically until recently. Preliminary research shows that for older adults, in particular, practising regularly may:

- Reduce anxiety and depression
- Improve balance and coordination, thus reducing the number of falls
- Improve sleep quality, by staying asleep longer at night and feeling more alert during the day
- Slow bone loss in women following menopause
- Reduce high blood pressure
- Improve cardiovascular fitness
- Relieve chronic pain
- Improve everyday physical functioning

When learnt correctly and practised regularly, Tai Chi can be a positive form of exercise because:

- It's self paced and non-competitive
- You don't need a large space, special clothing or equipment
- You can do it anytime and anyplace
- It's easy to do in groups, as well as by yourself

As Tai Chi is slow and gentle, it has virtually no negative side effects. It's possible that you could strain yourself or overdo things when first learning, but with proper instruction this shouldn't pose a barrier to practising Tai Chi.



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LEARNING TAI CHI

To gain the full benefits of Tai Chi and reduce the small risk of injury, learn to do the postures and movements the correct way from the start. Strict attention to your body position and breathing are critical, so it's best to study directly under a qualified teacher. As you attend a series of classes, the instructor can give you personal guidance and correct any errors in your approach before they become habit. As you practise, you learn how to do Tai Chi without straining your muscles and joints, and you can also learn from multimedia productions such as instructional DVD's and tapes. Once you're comfortable with the basics, do it by yourself. You may find it helpful to practise in the same place and at the same time every day.

You are likely to experience some health benefits right away, but they probably won't be dramatic. Be patient. Health benefits accumulate over time. Although Tai Chi is generally safe, consider talking with your doctor before starting a new programme, especially if you have any problems with your joints, spine or heart. •

Related articles:

- Nia - Love your Body, Love your Life (Issue 14, p. 92)
- Mister Mo (Issue 18, p. 60)

dinFO box

You can find Tai Chi classes throughout South Africa. To locate a class in your community or enquire about the long distance training programme, send an email to morne@sataichi.org or visit www.sataichi.org.

For more information and articles on Tai Chi for health, visit my teacher's website at www.taijiworld.com/tai-chi-for-health.html.

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Superfoods vs. Today's Foods

A big hype word nowadays is superfoods, and it's a good hype because we need to look carefully at the benefits and differences between superfoods and today's food groups.

So what is a superfood? Also known as a whole food, it is a natural raw food that has many health benefits. It's full of anti-oxidants, vitamins, essential fats, polysaccharides, enzymes, glyconutrients, and minerals. Furthermore, it is 100 % organic, pesticide free, nature's own and has been used for centuries to boost health. But what makes superfoods so superior is that our bodies are able to recognise and utilise the high levels of nutrients contained, as they should be, in comparison to shop-bought foods or vitamins that our bodies are unable to absorb, and so we get very little benefit from our hard-earned monies spent on these products.

Believe it or not, we are actually supposed to eat to live and not live to eat. Please don't think I am saying that we shouldn't enjoy eating, as there is nothing more enjoyable than sitting down to a plate of good, well-prepared food. What I am saying is, we need to remember that we eat to get the benefits of the nutrients from food, so that we can lead healthy and social lives with our loved ones and friends.

Benefits of superfoods

The benefits of eating superfoods include:

- **More energy:** the healthier our bodies, the more energy we will have.
- **Fat loss:** not because these foods have weight-loss benefits, but because they are so nutrient dense you will eat less as you are satisfied quicker.
- **Strengthening our immune system and being able to fight free radicals better:** keeping our cells younger and stronger, and slowing down aging.



Superior superfoods

The following are examples of superfoods:

More commonly-known products	Lesser-known products (can be found in most health shops)
Goji berries	Hemp seeds
Actually most berries	Chia seeds
Cacao	Maca
Broccoli	Ashwaghandha
Spinach	Amalalu
Oats	Gotu kola
Salmon	Triketu
Tomatoes	Acai
Walnuts	
Real yoghurt	

Always remember they must be 100 % organic!

Today's foods

Due to the fast-paced, frenetic lifestyles we lead today, where speed and convenience are essential, most 'shop-bought' foods on the shelves are made to last longer and are quicker to prepare. To make them taste good, a lot of preservatives, trans fats, flavourants, colourants, and chemical processes are added. What you end up with is a pretty unhealthy package.

Ironically, as a nutritionist, when I suggest vitamins or my own homemade muesli to clients, they are wary and want to know what's in it. But when they eat at a restaurant or buy foods from a shop, they don't question or read the labels to see what it contains. An ingredient like maca, for instance, which is a superfood and natural plant product with many health benefits, scares them more than E413 and E417 flavour enhancers (artificial food additives)! Similarly, a prescription from a doctor doesn't make them question the product; as long as they get instant relief, they don't care about the long-term effects. They will also rather believe what some unknown person says in a magazine or ad on TV than someone who is sitting right in front of them ☺. Just the other day, I had a woman ask me how safe it was to give her seven-year-old daughter a whole vitamin pill that I had recommended. I replied that I would be more scared to give her daughter 2 Minute Noodles, which she told me she loves so much. The fact is, the vitamin has been scientifically proved after six years of research, where the 2 Minute Noodles are full of artificially enhanced flavours.

Healthy tips:

- Remember, when you cook with oil, even good oils like olive and avocado, it gets transformed into a bad fat because of the heating process. So when stir frying or sautéing onions, try to use things like soya sauce mixed with water, or balsamic vinegar, plain yoghurt, and even feta cheese water to help prevent burning, and enhance the flavour.
- Try and incorporate as many superfoods into your diet as you can, because there are no limits.
- There is no quick fix for weight loss, but start to make little changes in your daily diet to eventually get to a lifestyle with more natural, healthy options than the quick cooking, man-made options.
- All superfoods will contribute to better sports performance. Not because they are magic, but purely because the healthier your body is, the better it will perform. •

Related articles

- How Good is Milk for You? (Issue 19, p. 90)
- Clever Nutrition for Mega Long Races (Issue 18, p. 84)
- Are you Supplement Savvy? (Issue 14, p. 96)

dinFO box i

For more information or advice on improving your lifestyle through better food choices, tips on how to prepare food, and how to become healthier by using the correct vitamins and minerals, without dieting or having boring, restrictive diets, visit www.passion4wholeness.co.za.



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FOR MORE INFORMATION: Hannele@geminips.co.za or jesblue2@yahoo.com





Hannes Potgieter and Phillip-Neil Albertyn



At the border between Germany and France

AROUND THE WORLD ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT

EUROPE TO NORTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

A CHILDHOOD DREAM BECAME A REALITY AFTER A FEW GOOD BOTTLES OF WINE AT A BRAAI WITH SOME BUDDIES. THAT DREAM WAS TO TRAVEL AROUND THE WORLD. THERE AND THEN THE 'RULES' FOR THE ADVENTURE WERE SET: ALL FIVE CONTINENTS MUST BE COVERED FROM COAST TO COAST, BETWEEN THE LAST TWO OLYMPIC GAMES (BEIJING 2008 AND LONDON 2012), AND ONLY BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT! HANNES POTGIETER JOINED ME FOR THE FIRST LEG, THE REST OF THE TIME MY ONLY COMPANY WAS FELLOW TRAVELLERS AND LOCALS.

EUROPE

Seeing as Europe is the smallest continent and one where we could mix up the means of transport with some cycling next to the incredibly scenic rivers on offer, we decided to make Europe our first destination. So Hannes and I converted our old mountain bikes into makeshift touring bikes, which we assembled on arrival at Frankfurt Airport.

Our plan was to cycle through the picturesque countryside to Meins, where the Mein and Rhine Rivers converge, then paddle north on the dramatic Rhine Gorge, with its fairytale castles lining its banks, to Koblenz, and then switch to the Mosel River. The ride was very rewarding as we went from the one little village to the next, but the adventure came to a sudden halt when I was hit by a car in Luxemburg and had to be rushed to the hospital to get patched up.

After a day of recovery for me and my bike we were good to continue on towards the lovely city of Menz, where we took a high-speed train to Paris, the world's most popular city destination. After a few days of sightseeing around this grand old city, we worked our way to Dieppe and caught an overnight ferry across the English Channel to Eastbourne, a large town and borough in East Sussex. Back in the saddle, we worked our way to the lovely seaside town of Brighton, with its beautiful architecture and impressive colonial-style piers that stretch a few hundred metres into the sea. ▶



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With each wrap project and every client having their own specific requirements, the correct materials need to be selected to guarantee a successful "wrap". At bandit we only deal with the main material manufacturers and thoroughly test new materials before entering them into our specified list.



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First day in a new continent - Brooklyn Bridge, New York



The overnight ferry across Lake Nicaragua

An easy 45-minute cycle through the lush, green countryside took us to London and the many old routes down the Thames. Cycling around London is amazing because its previous Mayor had promoted cycling as a means of transport. One of the slogans that stuck with me was, 'The weather is always good for cycling - you might not be rightly clothed'. After a few fine days in the British capital we headed back to the mainland by bus and then took a ferry, via Calais and Brugge, to Amsterdam - the most cycle-friendly country in the world. The bicycle was the perfect way to explore this city and its flat countryside made it easy to get around.

WITH THE FIRST OF FIVE CONTINENTS COMPLETED, WE DISASSEMBLED OUR BIKES AND HOPPED ON A BUS TO FRANKFURT. SO FAR, OUR JOURNEY HAD TAKEN 28 DAYS.



The Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco

NORTH AMERICA

Next up was North America, which I reached after a 20-hour flight via Dubai, and the logical place to start was in the financial powerhouse, New York. Arriving in the Big Apple, I managed to cover more than 20 km on foot the first day and made a few discoveries of my own: Central Park is all but a flat piece of land, Times Square is a triangle, and Madison Square Garden is oval!

I reached my second destination, Washington, by bus and was blown away by the size of the Mall, a 19.1-mile long lawn that is anchored at one end by the Lincoln Memorial and on the other by Capitol Hill and all the memorials. The different museums, such as the Air and Space Museums, are regarded by many as perhaps the biggest and best of their kind in the world, and the fact that it is all free was very pleasing to the budget!

Greyhound was running a seven-day bus pass special for US\$100, so I picked a few cities and would sleep either on the bus or in bus stations. My first stop was in Boston. Setting out on foot, my explorations through this pleasant city took me from Harvard Campus all the way to the Freedom Trail, a 2.5-mile, brick-lined route that leads you to 16 historically significant sites - each one an authentic treasure - including museums, meeting houses, churches, burying grounds, and its historical harbour. Taking an overnight bus to Montreal, I joined the colourful festivities in Quebec, where it's made abundantly clear that this part of the country is French. Bidding Quebec au revoir, I headed to the Niagara Falls, on the Canadian side. Niagara Falls is the collective name for three waterfalls (Horseshoe Falls, American

Falls and Bridal Veil Falls) that straddle the international border between Ontario (Canada) and New York (USA). I spent the entire day here, totally captivated, and can understand why the falls are world renowned for their beauty. Moving on, I made my way past the Great Lakes to the motor capital, Detroit. Here I was shocked to discover that the city has lost almost a third of its population as a result of the recession in the motor industry. Contrary to Detroit, Chicago was vibrant and energetic, with an impressive skyline that can give New York a run for its money any day. My one-week special pass expired as I arrived in the town of Seneca, in Kansas, and where I hooked up with my brother for a week and enjoyed the American rural life and 4th of July celebrations; definite highlights of this trip.

Leaving the charm of the east behind me, I hitch-hiked to the west coast; a decision that opened the window to a number of weird and wonderful experiences. Making my way to San Francisco, via Denver in the Rockies, the sober Salt Lake City, and the not so sober Las Vegas, I was picked up by BIG truckers, as well as people fresh from jail and everything in-between. After 40 days of hard travelling I finally reached San Francisco, with its trolley cars, Alcatraz, and the Golden Gate Bridge, declared one of the modern Wonders of the World by the American Society of Civil Engineers - a perfect end to this east-west leg.

Turning south, I boarded a Greyhound bus for Los Angeles and San Diego, and spent a few days there visiting various famous landmarks, including the 'Walk of Fame' and Olympic Stadium, before crossing into Mexico - without even stopping at customs. This was the start of a much different world.

My first few days here saw me cross the barren and imposing mountain range of Sierra Madre Occidental on a Mexican Intercity bus to Los Mochis, where I took a train through Copper Canyon, a canyon system in the Sierra Tarahumara, in the south western



Boarding a train to Haute-Normandie



The Chiva Rumba bus



Enjoying the train ride through Copper Canyon, Mexico



My transport to Panama; a old converted US school bus

part of the state of Chihuahua. This 12-hour journey is through some of the most breathtaking scenery imaginable and, for me, it has got to be one of the most scenic train trips in the world. The train continued further south with stops at Guadalajara and Mexico City, and I hopped off here to visit the imposing Mayan Pyramids on its outskirts. I was really impressed with the Mexican food, some of the best I had sampled on my travels so far. I had arranged to meet a friend in Veracruz, so I made my way to the holiday capital of Mexico, to spend a week in the Presidential Suite of a resort hotel that is owned by friends. After months of travelling on a tight budget, this was a very welcome alternative.

CENTRAL AMERICA

Central America was incredible, and although tiny on a map, it packs in more diversity than any similar-sized area on the planet. Some of the highlights included a visit to the Turneffe Islands on the coast of Belize, which boasts the biggest sinkhole in the sea and is a diver's paradise. A real gem was the two weeks I spent in the town of Antigua, in Guatemala, where I attended a Spanish school, to get a better understanding of the Spanish language (with limited success), and then visited my first active volcano just outside the town. From here, my travels took me on nerve-racking rides on 'chicken busses' into the jungles of El Salvador and Honduras, before taking a ferry across Lake Nicaragua to one of the world's most popular eco-tourist destinations, Costa Rica. Here I was joined by my good friend Mariaan Kriel, who won the bronze medal in the 100 m backstroke at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, and we enjoyed a few relaxing days in the sun, on a gorgeous white beach, swimming in the clear water, and refining my backstroke technique ...

The last real landmark of note was the Panama Canal, an 82-kilometre ship canal in Panama that connects the Atlantic Ocean (via the Caribbean Sea) to the Pacific Ocean. What makes this canal so significant is that the ships are lifted and lowered by a set of locks up to a level of 23 m above sea level between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, by means of gravity water from a nearby river - it's a hugely impressive piece of engineering. And with this, my Central American leg ended: one hundred days after leaving left New York.

After completing this leg I learnt that the Americans are not the richest nation in the world just because they are loud, but because they are hard working and have a healthy respect for the law and police. Mexicans are not just tequila-drinking bandits, but a proud and colourful nation with perhaps the best cuisine in the world. And the Central Americans are not all into drugs and guns, but are warm-hearted, friendly people and always willing to help.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE, MY TRAVELS BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT TAKE ME TO SOUTH AMERICA; THE FINAL LEG OF MY JOURNEY IN THE AMERICAS, AND THE COMPLETION OF TWO OF FIVE CONTINENTS. AND THEN IT IS ON TO THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT, WHICH IS SAID TO PRESENT AN EXTRAORDINARY SPECTRUM OF ENCOUNTERS FOR THE TRAVELLER - I COULDN'T WAIT TO FIND OUT FOR MYSELF. •



Related articles:

- Two Scots on the Trot (Issue 19, p. 34)
- Cinque Terre - Five Lands to Love (Issue 18, p. 116)
- Across the Spine of Taiwan (Issue 15, p. 22)

Birding Hot Spots

In my last article, in DO IT NOW Magazine Issue 18, I discussed what you need to become a bird watcher and touched on the subject of where to start. Now I would like to share my birding hot spots with you, but before I carry on I just want to say that I'm no professional, but I am extremely passionate about my hobby and the tips and advice given are based on 14 years of birdwatching experience.

Birdwatching is a hobby that can be done alone or with the family, and anytime. So where can you go to watch and photograph our feathered friends, other than in your own garden? Good places to enjoy birdwatching are botanical gardens, bird sanctuaries, game reserves and parks, lagoons, wetlands, rivers, dams, and even beaches. But where you go really comes down to where you live and how far you are prepared to travel. Sasol has published a very nice map of birding hot spots in South Africa, which I've found to be very useful. My wife and I have visited a few of these, as well as some other great spots, and I recommend the following:

MARIEVALE BIRD SANCTUARY

RATING: Excellent. This is one of my favourite birding spots, and what makes it so attractive is the fact that you can sit in one of the hides and wait for the birds to come to you. I have never been disappointed on a trip to Marievale.

VIEWING OPTIONS: Five bird hides, as well as sections in the field that you can drive through. It is mostly wetland and a haven for a variety of water birds. As water birds are easy to identify, this is a good place to visit if you are a beginner as it will help you to improve your identification skills.

FACILITIES: There are a number of ablution facilities, such as a toilet and basin, at each hide, as well as a picnic area with braai facilities. Drinking the water here is not recommended, so rather bring your own. In fact, I would suggest you bring your own cooler box if you are planning to visit any birding location.

SPECIES: With a total list of over 280 species, including cormorant, African darter, grebe, heron, egret, yellow-billed stork, African spoonbill, ibis, duck, teal, and kingfisher, this sanctuary has become a magnet for twitchers as rare species are frequently reported here.

LOCATION: Situated just outside of Nigel, you can use one of two routes. The main entrance is from the Nigel Delmas Road, but you can also use the entrance from the Springs Nigel Road. This route is more difficult as there is no signage to indicate the way.

RIETVLEI NATURE RESERVE

RATING: Excellent. It is very similar to Marievale.

VIEWING OPTIONS: There are hides, but you do more viewing from your vehicle.

FACILITIES: There is a picnic spot and ablution facilities.

SPECIES: Common water birds, a variety of grassland birds, chats, bee-eaters, kingfishers, and more.

LOCATION: Situated 18 km from the centre of Pretoria and 38 km from the OR Tambo International Airport.

KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

RATING: Excellent. This is the ultimate place for me as you get to see more than just birds. As there is so much to see, make sure you plan your day properly and take enough food and water with you.

VIEWING OPTIONS: Ninety percent is done from your vehicle.

FACILITIES: Ablutions are plentiful, but far apart.

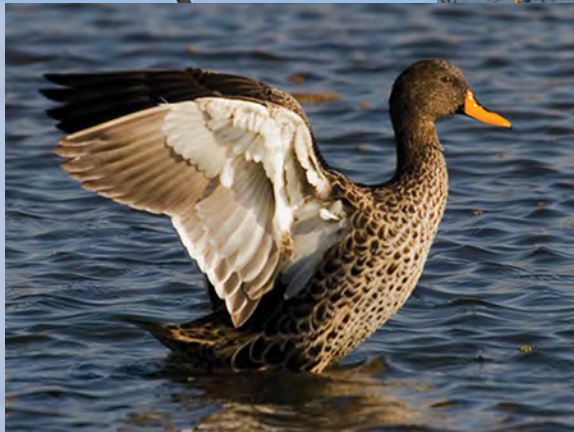
SPECIES: The list is very long with 507 bird species to feast your eyes upon, but the types of species you see depends on which camp or campsite you are staying in. If you want to spot raptures, vultures and other birds of prey, you will have to venture out into the park. But no matter where you are in the Kruger National Park, you won't be disappointed.

LOCATION: Situated in the provinces of Limpopo and Mpumalanga. ▶



Malachite kingfisher





FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:

1. African black oystercatcher, Paternoster Beach 2. Black-shouldered kite, Pilanesberg 3. Yellow-billed stork, Pilanesberg 4. Reed cormorant, Marievale 5. Yellow-billed duck, Marievale 6. Giant kingfisher, Pilanesberg

DE HOOP NATURE RESERVE

RATING: Good. I've only been there once and it was not the best time of the year.

VIEWING OPTIONS: Funnily enough, in De Hoop we worked the entire day from the vehicle and just couldn't get really close to the birds. However, on departure we spent some time at the entrance gate sitting on a wall and all the bird life came to us. Some came so close that I had to retreat to get focus for my photographs.

FACILITIES: The visitor's centre has a curio shop, restaurant, and ablutions.

SPECIES: Famous for its variety of resident and migratory bird species, more than 260 species, including the Cape sugar bird and other sunbirds, have been recorded on the reserve. De Hoop Vlei attracts large numbers of water birds, and the only remaining breeding colony of the rare Cape vulture in the Western Cape occurs at Potberg.

LOCATED: Situated east of Bredasdorp, approximately 260 km from Cape Town, in the Overberg region, near the southern tip of Africa.

Other places I've found to be really interesting and rewarding are the Karoo National Park, Walter Sisulu Botanical Gardens, Pilanesberg Nature Reserve, and the West Coast. In South Africa we are truly spoilt for choice when it comes to beautiful places that provide the most spectacular birdlife. So wherever you are, be it at home or on holiday, remember to explore your surroundings and you'll be pleasantly surprised.

My final word of advice is to be very aware of your safety in any public area, in South Africa, as many of the birding spots are isolated and your equipment is valuable. Marievale has never had any incidents that I know of, whereas Nylsvlei Nature Reserve and Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens have both had incidents of people being robbed. Therefore, when venturing into unfamiliar territory, take the time to find a birding club in the area you are visiting by searching the internet or speak to the local authorities, and always try to go in a group or at least with a friend.

UNTIL THE NEXT TIME, HAPPY BIRDWATCHING. •



Related articles:

- Wanted! Birds (Issue 18, p. 108)
- Birds of Prey Fall Victim to Hard Times (Issue 10, p. 128)

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LINKS TO THE BIRDING HOT SPOTS:

MARIEVALE BIRD SANCTUARY:

www.birdingroutes.co.za/gauteng/sites/gbrbs1.12_marievale_sanctuary.html

RIETVLEI NATURE RESERVE: www.rietvlei-reserve.co.za

KRUGER NATIONAL PARK: www.krugerpark.co.za

DE HOOP NATURE RESERVE: www.capenature.co.za/reserves.htm?reserve=De+Hoop+Nature+Reserve

KAROO NATIONAL PARK:

www.sanparks.co.za/parks/karoo/

WALTER SISULU BOTANICAL GARDENS:

www.sanbi.org/gardens/walter-sisulu

PILANESBERG NATURE RESERVE:

www.pilanesberg-game-reserve.co.za/



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CENTRAL RESERVATIONS

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PHOTOGRAPHIC CHRONICLES

SHOOT!

A SKATEBOARDING WORLD CUP

EXTREME SPEEDS AND A CULT CULTURE CLASH INTO FOCUS WHEN YOU SHOOT SKATEBOARDING, AND WHAT BETTER PLACE TO DO IT THAN IN KIMBERLEY, IN THE NORTHERN CAPE!

The arid plains of the Diamond Fields will, at first glance, not seem like the perfect place to present a world-class event like the Maloof World Skateboarding Championships. I mean, other than the Big Hole, what are you going to find in Kimberley?

These may have been my first thoughts when I went to shoot this mammoth gathering of skate punks from around the globe, but any doubt was soon dispelled upon arrival in the 'Diamond City'. The rock stars of skating were all in attendance, from Andy MacDonald and Pierre Luc Gagnon



to Manny Santiago, and not forgetting Jean-Marc Johannes from Cape Town and the rest of the South African SK8 contingent.

The fantastic skate park blew everyone away and more than once I heard the American skaters bemoaning the fact that they had to travel all the way to Africa to find the best skate park in the world!

Add to this the friendly vibe so typical of the Northern Cape and you just know you have a kick-butt event waiting to go off. And the Maloof Money Cup certainly did, with 540 drifts and more backside power slides than you could shake a deck at. And the only way to shoot all of this? At extremely high speeds, of course!

IMAGE 1: DIAMOND CITY GRIND

The Action: I wanted to combine the history of Kimberley with the contemporary action of the Maloof Money Cup, and the 'Old Town' section of Kimberley was just the place.

The Shot: I set up a shot with Ply, a young skateboarder from Thailand, along one of the sidewalks passing an old tram, and used my brand new, under-the-radar Nikon D600.

The Technique: I selected Commander Mode for the flash, with an off-camera SB-910 unit firing from a doorway to illuminate the skater in the shade of the awning.

The Specifications: 1/250th sec @ f8; Nikon D600 + 16 mm fisheye lens; ISO 100; WB Setting (Auto); AE Setting (-1 EV); monochrome process added in Adobe Lightroom.

More Information: www.northerncape.org.za





IMAGE 2: IRON MEN

The Action: Kumba Iron Ore, one of the Northern Cape's top industrial companies, sponsored the Mini-Mega Ramp, rumoured to be one of the best set-ups in the world.

The Shot: Shooting up close and as wide as you can makes for dynamic skate action – I cannot recommend the Nikon D600 highly enough.

The Technique: Two off-camera SB-910 units, attached to Gorilla-Pods clamped to poles, meant I could evenly light the whole scene to avoid harsh mid-day shadows.

The Specifications: 1/640th sec @ f8; Nikon D600 + 16mm fisheye lens; ISO -1.0; WB Setting (Auto); AE Setting (-1 EV)

More Information: www.northerncape.org.za



IMAGE 3: PLG, IN YOUR FACE

The Action: The world-class vert ramp in Kimberley's Maloof Skate Plaza towers a good two storeys high and, for three phenomenal days, this was the playground of the gods of big air.

The Shot: During the practise rounds, we were given pretty much carte blanche to shoot the skaters up close and personal, and Vert Champ Pierre Luc Gagnon did a fly-past right in the zone.

The Technique: Two NIKON SB-910 flashes, connected to Pocket Wizard TT5 transceivers, provided bi-directional fill-in flash from both sides, eliminating the harsh midday shadows.

The Specifications: 1/800th sec @ f8; Nikon D800 + 16 mm fisheye lens; ISO 100; WB Setting (Sunlight); 2 x Remote SB-910 units; AE Setting (-1 EV).

More Information: www.maloofmoneycup.com

IMAGE 4: BIG AIR ASSAULT

The Action: Day three saw continued action on the vert and mini-mega ramps, with awe-inspiring aerial manoeuvres by the world's top skateboarders.

The Shot: After three solid days of shooting skateboarding, I was keen to explore different techniques and thought I'd try out my Lensbaby Sweet Spot 35 mm.

The Technique: The Lensbaby is basically a 35 mm lens where you have a sharp focal area in the centre with gradual blurring towards the edges, thus creating a pleasing effect.

The Specifications: 1/1 250th sec @ f5.6; Nikon D800 + Lensbaby Sweet Spot 35; ISO 100; WB Setting (Auto); AE Setting (-1 EV); on-camera fill-in from SB-910 zoomed to 135 mm.

More Information: www.nikon.co.za and www.lensbaby.co.za





КУМЕР А ИРОНТИ
PRESENTED BY

SKATEBOARD CHAMPIONSHIPS
WORLD CUP
SOUTH AFRICA
2008



IMAGE 5: TOUCH DOWN

The Action: Kimberley's Maloof Skate Plaza featured phenomenal graphics, making for great visuals on the Mini-Mega Ramp.

The Shot: The practice sessions offered many an opportunity to experiment with unusual angles, like this aerial image shot off the light-weight NIKON D600 attached to a mono-pod.

The Technique: Some Lightroom treatment and the use of a Lensbaby Sweet Spot 35 add drama to this overhead image.

The Specifications: 1/1600th sec @ f4; Nikon D600 + Lensbaby Sweet Spot 35; ISO 160; WB Setting (Sunlight); AE Setting (0 EV)

**WIN
R500!**



Winner

Photographer: Carl Erler

Photograph: Surf surf surf surf surf surf surf's UP ...

Camera Type: Canon EOS 600D

Camera Settings: f/4.5, Exp 1/160, ISO-100

Place: Phuket

Category: Lifestyle

NEW inFOCUS Quarterly Competition

With effect from January 2013, the inFOCUS competition will feature a photo winner in every quarterly issue of the magazine, with a R500 voucher to be won! The closing date for the April 2013 competition is 4 March 2013. Please email entries to competitions@doitnow.co.za

Good news for all entrants! All entries received in 2013 will be entered into a final draw to take place at the end of December 2013. The winner will be announced in the January 2014 issue. The details of the grand prize will be announced on the DO IT NOW website, www.doitnow.co.za.

When emailing your images to us please include the following information:

- Name of photographer
- Name of photograph
- Camera type
- Camera settings
- Place where the photograph was taken
- Which category you are submitting your photo under - Adventure, Sport or Lifestyle

Competition rules can be viewed on www.doitnow.co.za

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A FABULOUSLY FESTIVE FEAST

HERE ARE SOME OF MY FAVOURITE RECIPES FOR A SUMPTUOUS HOLIDAY FEAST.

Starter **SERVES 10**

HERBED FLAPJACKS WITH SMOKED TROUT, HORSERADISH CREAM AND ENDIVE

INGREDIENTS:

225 g (1 ½ cups) self raising flour
250 ml (1 cup) Milk
1 Egg, lightly whisked
¼ Cup chopped fresh basil
2 Tablespoon chopped fresh chives
125 g (½ cup) Sour cream
1 Tablespoon horseradish cream
1 Teaspoon fresh lemon juice
1 Tablespoon milk, extra
30 g Butter, melted
Melted butter, to grease
1 Baby endive, leaves separated, washed and dried
2 Tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 Tablespoons fresh lemon juice, extra
1 (about 220 g) Whole smoked trout (head, skin and bones removed) and flaked
Fresh chives, plus extra (cut into 3 cm lengths) to serve

METHOD:

1. Sift the flour into a large bowl. Make a well in the centre. Whisk the milk and egg in a large jug. Add the milk mixture to the flour, whisking constantly until a smooth batter forms. Stir in half the chives and then transfer to a large jug. Cover and place in the fridge for 30 minutes to rest.
2. Meanwhile, combine the sour cream, horseradish cream, lemon juice, extra milk, and remaining basil and chives in a small bowl. Cover with plastic wrap and place in the fridge to chill.
3. Stir the butter into the batter. Heat a large non-stick frying pan over medium heat and grease with melted butter. Drop eight one-tablespoon quantities of batter into the pan from the tip of the spoon, allowing room for spreading. Cook for 2-3 minutes or until bubbles appear on the surface and flapjacks are golden underneath. Turn and cook for a further 1-2 minutes or until golden. Transfer to a large plate, cover with foil to keep warm. Repeat, in four more batches, using the melted butter and remaining batter.
4. Place the endive in a bowl. Combine the oil and extra lemon juice in a small bowl and then pour over the endive. Toss to combine. Then divide the endive and flapjacks among serving plates. Top with the sour cream mixture, smoked trout and extra chives.

Main **SERVINGS 25**

MAPLE HONEY MUSTARD GLAZED HAM

INGREDIENTS:

100 g (½ cup, firmly packed) Brown sugar
80 ml (⅓ cup) Maple syrup
80 ml (⅓ cup) Honey
1 Tablespoon Dijon mustard
1 (about 8 kg) Whole leg ham, on the bone
Whole cloves, for studding

METHOD:

1. Stir the sugar, maple syrup, honey, and mustard in a bowl until the sugar dissolves.
2. Preheat the oven to 170°C. Line a large baking dish with two layers of non-stick baking paper. Place an oven shelf in the lowest position and remove all other shelves. Use a sharp knife to cut around the shank of the ham, about 10 cm from the end. Run a knife under the rind around edge of ham. Gently lift the rind off in one piece, running your fingers between the rind and the fat. Score the fat in a diamond pattern, about 5 mm deep. Stud the centres of the diamonds with cloves and then transfer to a prepared dish.
3. Brush one-third of the glaze over the ham. Bake, brushing with glaze every 25 minutes for 1 hour 30 minutes.



Dessert **SERVINGS 6-8**

A TRADITIONAL TAKE ON CHRISTMAS PUDDING

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 ½ Cups flour
- 1 Teaspoon baking soda
- ½ Cup warm water
- ½ Cup molasses
- ½ Cup brown sugar
- 1 Teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 Teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 Teaspoon nutmeg
- 3 Cups cranberries
- 1 Cup walnuts or pecans

METHOD:

1. Sift the flour and baking soda together in a small bowl. In a separate bowl, beat together the water, molasses, brown sugar, and spices. Stir the flour mixture into the liquid ingredients until smooth and then fold in the cranberries and nuts.
2. Pour the batter into a well greased pudding mould, leaving at least one inch of headroom for the pudding to rise. Don't forget to grease the lid.
3. Set on a trivet or folder towel in a pot large enough to hold the mould. Pour boiling water to come half to two-thirds of the way up the side of the mould. Bring the water to a boil again on the stove, then reduce heat to a healthy simmer, cover the pot tightly and steam the pudding for 1 ½ to 2 hours, or until a toothpick inserted into the pudding comes out clean.
4. Allow the pudding to cool for 15-20 minutes, then un-mould onto a serving platter and serve with whipped cream, or eggnog sauce. Alternatively, you can also flame it with rum and serve it with eggnog sauce for an extra treat.

Enjoy preparing this fabulous festive feast for your friends and family, and bon appétit!



Related articles:

- Courgette and Ricotta Pasta (Issue 19, p. 135)
- Spring Lamb Stew (Issue 18, p. 131)



IN PURSUIT OF **IN REVIEW** DRIVING PLEASURE

JAGUAR **XKR**

Before I start I want to say something I can probably only say once, because it's true: The Jaguar XKR is the most beautiful car in production today. Okay, an Aston Martin might be as good or a bit better looking, then again it was designed by the same person, on the same piece of paper. But you just don't find that long bonnet, curvy hips and perfectly balanced silhouette on supercars costing double or more.

Inside the good looks are complemented by fully adjustable leather seats. By fully I mean you can shape the seat to your body like clay. Even the wings on the sides can be ordered to hug you and keep you in position when cornering wildly. The dashboard, door panels, and steering wheel are also covered in leather, while the pillars and roof lining are soft-touch suede.

Okay, so the XKR is a pleasant place to be in, but depress the pulsating stop/start button and the 5-litre V8 masterpiece of an engine comes to life. Without touching the accelerator, the rev-needle blips to 2 000 r/min just to let the neighbours know that you're out in your Jag. Thanks to a supercharger in the R-version I drove, power output is a massive 375 kW and torque 625 Nm. The XKR only comes with a six-speed automatic gearbox, but there's no gear lever. Instead, a turn dial rises up from the centre console when you start the engine. Turn it to D and off you go. You have the option to manually shift via the paddles behind the steering wheel, but the automatic works so well you never need to. What impressed me most was that when you shifted to S mode with the gear knob, the gears are held for longer before upshifting and downshift aggressively under hard braking. You can choose a lower power output for slippery conditions by pressing a button behind the gear knob or increase throttle response with another.

Apart from the amazing performance (0 - 100 km/h in 4.8 seconds and a limited top speed of 250 km/h, which can be raised to 280 with the Speed Pack, and 300 in the XKR-S), the handling is just right.

You can steer this 4.8-metre, nearly two-ton monster with telepathy, and you would have thought that with 20-inch rims and low-profile tyres you'd feel every white line on the road, but you don't. The ride is so supple that you feel as if you're in a boat, but turn in sharply and you know immediately where the road is.

This is not just a fast car. It has all the features a modern luxury sedan should have. The boot takes 330-litres and if you use the rear seats, in which no adult will be able to sit for more than a minute, you have more than enough space for your weekend-away luggage. Climate control, a great sound system, and SatNav keeps you cool, entertained, and driving in the right direction, and the adaptive cruise control keeps the desired following distance you dialled in. As I anticipated there is not much I can fault this car on, but if I had to point out something it would be that the rain sensing wipers did not do a better job than I could have done, and I only got 18 l/100 km on my first tank. On the next tank I got 15. Close to 10 is possible, but only if you have the restraint of a nun. For around R1.3 million this is still a bargain, and apart from the much more expensive Aston you won't get a car as good looking as the XKR. ▶

THE NEW

86



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RANGE ROVER EVOQUE SI4 AUTOMATIC (4WD)

Say what you like about the Evoque being a poser or a party planner's car, you can't deny its good looks and with 177 kW under the hood, it'll go on to do 217 km/h. And it has settings for snow, mud, rocks and sand. That's not all though. It has the most exciting feature I've ever seen on any car so far: when you unlock the doors via the remote at night, a light under the mirror illuminates a search-light-like circle on the ground next to the car with a shadow outline of the Evoque's body. I mean, how cool is that? Imagine the designers sitting around the Tata boardroom table suggesting this and then imagine the bigwigs saying: "We like it, let's do it!"

Then there's the interior. A lot of the switch-gear is shared with the Jaguar, from the gear knob to the stop/start button. The rain sensing wipers work and there is more than enough leather in here too. The seats are comfortable for all four passengers and you can still fit 575-litres of luggage in the boot if it's in liquid form. Even though the rear window is on the small side you don't feel cramped thanks to the fixed panoramic roof with power blind.

Propelling a 1 670 kg SUV with a little 2-litre petrol turbo engine might sound silly, but once the revs rise above 1 750 r/min, peak torque of 340 Nm is at your disposal. Doing 180 km/h it is still not out of breath and unfazed by a light side wind. The six-speed automatic gearbox is responsive when you step on it and in S-mode even more so. You also have the shift paddles behind the steering wheel as in the XKR. The Terrain Response works like the system found in the Freelander, adjusting the suspension and ride height. When in the Adaptive Dynamics mode the system detects off-road terrain and optimises the advanced MagneRide damper settings to give the best balance of comfort and handling.

Dynamic mode can also be selected from this knob and provides for better on-road handling and less body roll. Even though the Evoque does not have low range, the Hill Descent Control can be used to maintain crawling speeds down steep inclines.

Needless to say it's got all the safety features and most of the mod cons, including a satellite navigation system that did not have the road between the N7 and Hopefield on it.

Luckily, the turning circle is only 11.3 metres and I could make a quick, almost-legal U-turn to get back on track. Starting at R591 700 it does not really qualify as a 'budget' Range Rover and is right in the price range of the stunning X3 xDrive35i with that award-winning straight six. Just remember that the Evoque returned 8 l/100 km and the BMW 8 km/l (12.5 l/100 km), and the Evoque is so much better looking. After all, isn't that what's important when buying a 4x4 these days?

OPEL MERIVA 1.4T COSMO

Not the most beautiful car in this month's issue I must admit, but certainly interesting. The oddly-shaped side windows and shoulder line give it a quirky appearance, but inside you can see and feel that it's part of the Astra family. That is a good thing, as today's Opels come standard with almost everything that you pay extra for on a VW. Really, the list is quite impressive. There are automatic levelling halogen headlamps with control intelligent high beam, a panoramic roof, climate control, rain-sensing wipers, and up to 32 storage possibilities. But best of all is that everything actually works. On my first day in the Meriva I had to make an urgent phone call.



With the new law in the Western Cape kidnapping your phone for 24 hours when you are caught (a law I support by the way), I pressed the phone button on the radio and started giving voice demands as requested by the German-sounding lady. I kid you not, with the first attempt I got it right and there is no voice dialling programmed on my phone.

The next test was taking the in-laws, who were visiting from China, on a wine tour while officially photographing the Franschhoek Uncorked Festival. We visited 19 wine farms in two days, and this is where the Meriva proved to be perfect. The rear doors open to the rear (yes, it has suicide doors) and this takes some getting used to at first, with the driver and right rear passenger trying to step out onto the same spot each time. After a while you get used to it and the wine-thirsty passengers knew it was time to stop 'tasting' when they couldn't get into the car anymore. Having to rush from cellar to cellar called for a lot of wine being consumed on the go (not the driver I must add), but luckily the rear occupants had Kulula-style tray tables, complete with holes perfect for a tasting glass.

Even though the passengers complained about a bumpy ride once or twice, no wine was spilt on the trip and the nippy 1.4 turbo petrol did well to get us from point A though S over the weekend. At first I thought it to be a 1.6 turbo, thanks to a healthy 103 kW and 200 Nm of torque. Winding up the motor and shifting rapidly though the slick six-speed manual reminded me that this practical little MPV (the boot takes up to 920-litres with the seats folded flat) was still an Opel at heart.

To conclude, it is a lot of car for R256 500. •

Related articles:

- In the Spotlight: Nissan Murano, Chevrolet Lumina SSV Ute, Toyota Avanza vs Nissan Livina (Issue 19, p. 138)
- In Review: Amarok, Nissan & Volvo - Be Pleasantly Surprised! (Issue 16, p. 112)
- Out the Box - Suzuki Swift 1.4GLS, OPEL ASTRA 1.4T Enjoy Plus & BMW G650GS (Issue 12, p. 24)

	JAGUAR XKR	RANGE ROVER EVOQUE SI4	OPEL MERIVA 1.4T COSMO
Engine	5-litre V8 supercharged	2-litre turbo petrol	1.4 turbo petrol
kW	375 (6 000 - 6 500 r/min)	177 (5 500 r/min)	103 (4 900 r/min)
Nm	625 (2 500 - 5 500 r/min)	340 (1 750 r/min)	200 (1 850 - 4 900 r/min)
0 - 100 km/h	4,8	7,6	10,3
Max	250	217	196
Tank (litres)	70,6	70	54
Actual consumption (l/100 km)	5.5 - 6.6	8,2	*6.7
Price	R1 313 400	R591 700	R256 500

* Claimed

MOVIE TITLE FRANKENWEENIE

Director: Tim Burton

Starring: Catherine O'Hara, Conchata Ferrell, Martin Landau, Martin Short, Robert Capron and Winona Ryder

HIGHLIGHTS

- Animation

Recommended for: All ages

VERDICT



The movie was inspired by Burton's 1984 short film of the same name. After inventing a machine to bring his dog back to life, things take a turn for the worse when Victor's classmates stumble upon his creation to bring their lost animals back from the dead. Although the plot is a simple one, the manner in which the story is told is what makes this movie worth watching.

We've all seen 3D movies, black and white movies, and stop-motion animated movies. Frankweenie, however, is a stop-motion animation, filmed in black and white, and 3D. I can't imagine anyone other than Tim Burton bringing a movie such as this to life. Each of the characters from the film are created based on movies from the past, with imaging reminiscent of Corpse Bride and The Nightmare Before Christmas.

Frankweenie is a movie filled with hidden trivia and goofs that will amuse both movie buffs and the average movie goer. It includes references from movies such as The Nightmare Before Christmas, Edward Scissor Hands, Frankenstein, Dracula, Pet Cemetery, Hello Kitty, The Mummy (1934), Bambi, Gremlins and even Godzilla.

The movie is dark and funny with a few scares thrown in for good measure. Although most of the humour and script will be lost on kids, it's still a good watch for all ages.

MOVIE TITLE TAKEN 2

Director: Olivier Megaton

Starring: Liam Neeson, Famke Janssen, Maggie Grace and Rade Serbedzija

HIGHLIGHTS

- Liam Neeson

Recommended for: Action movie fans

VERDICT



Taken 2, a sequel to the highly successful and utterly irresistible 2009 action thriller, which made 230 million dollars, sees the tall and beefy Liam Neeson return to form as Bryan Mills, a retired CIA operative. Directed by Pierre Morel, from a Luc Besson script, Taken helped cement Neeson's career as a bankable go-to action star, putting him in the forefront as one of the best action heroes in the last decade. A sequel was inevitable, but unfortunately Taken 2 has been met with plenty of criticism from fans and critics alike.

In Taken, Mills did look for them. He did find them. And he did kill them. But there was one thing that the man with "a very particular set of skills" didn't count on; Albanian human trafficking baddies have families too. And as it turns out, this group has a father who doesn't take kindly to CIA operatives killing off his sons, regardless of the bad things they did. Bad parenting aside, after just a few lines into the screenplay, he swears vengeance and goes in search of the Mills family. I don't know who is to blame for Taken, but it so happens that fans also come equipped with a particular set of skills - skills acquired over a lifetime of watching action movies, skills that make us a nightmare for people like them. We will look for him, we will find him, and we will kill him for ruining one of the greatest action movie characters!

GAME TITLE RESIDENT EVIL 6

VERDICT




Resident Evil 6, otherwise known as Resident Evil Giraffe, thanks to the placement of the "6" on the logo, is narratologically the most complete Resident Evil thus far, with most of the living main characters being present or playable, with the only exceptions being Claire Redfield and Jill Valentine. As well as these, several new characters are introduced who for the most part manage to avoid being boring filler characters. The game consists of three main campaigns, one for Leon, Chris (also known as Buff McHugeLarge) and newcomer Jake. After completing all three, a secret 4th campaign opens up.

The story involves the same period of time in each campaign, with each character following their own path and intersecting with the others at key points. Every campaign involves the main character and a partner, who can be controlled by the AI or by another player online. Thankfully, the AI is far less foolish than it has been in other games so far.

CD TITLE DARKSIDERS II

VERDICT




It's hard to call this a sequel because it doesn't really follow the previous game. Instead, Darksiders II's timeline runs parallel to the first and the story at first revolves around Death, brother to War and one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, journeying to the world between Heaven and Hell known as the Veil where he seeks to clear his brother of the crimes of which he has been accused of. But as he progresses through his quest, it becomes more personal and his past deeds catch up to him and demands he face the consequences. Overall, the stories Darksiders II presents aren't as scintillating at first, but as you progress, they become more engrossing and are ones which will engage the player and make them want to see the game through to its end – however, the biggest problem in this area is that the pacing is irregular. It takes some time to get from one plot point to the next and it's easy to lose sight of your goals as you adventure your way through that hidden dungeon you just stumbled across.

ENTERTAINMENT TO LOOK OUT FOR



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Cape Town,
Cape Town Stadium

Date: May 11
Johannesburg,
FNB Stadium



RISE OF THE GUARDIANS

Genre: Fantasy
Director: Peter Ramsey
Starring: Chris Pine, Alec
Baldwin and Hugh Jackman
Date: 7 Dec



THE HOBBIT

Genre: Fantasy
Director: Peter Jackson
Starring: Ian McKellen,
Martin Freeman, Richard
Armitage and James Nesbitt
Date: 14 Dec



LOOPER

Genre: Sci-Fi, Thriller
Director: Rian Johnson
Starring: Bruce Willis,
Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Emily
Blunt, Paul Dano, Noah
Segan and Jeff Daniels
Date: 14 Dec



END OF WATCH

Genre: Action, Adventure
Director: David Ayer
Starring: Jake Gyllenhaal,
Michael Peña, Anna
Kendrick, Frank Grillo
and David Harbour
Date: 21 Dec



HERE COMES THE BOOM

Genre: Comedy
Director: Frank Coraci
Starring: Kevin James,
Salma Hayek, Henry Winkler,
Greg Germann, Joe Rogan
and Bas Rutten
Date: 21 Dec

Quote: "The real problem is not whether machines think but whether men do." - B.F. Skinner

Don't miss these and many other great articles in the January 2013 issue of DO IT NOW Magazine.



CROSSFIT IN SOUTH AFRICA

They say a near-death experience makes you feel more alive. Perhaps that explains the cultish following of CrossFit, a growing fitness phenomenon you might want to test out if your 2013 resolution is to shape up. CrossFit is a training programme that claims to have molded some of the fittest athletes on Earth through gruelling, competitive workouts built on the basic functional movements of life—running, jumping, and lifting heavy things. Nearly 5,000 CrossFit gyms now dot the globe, and so far, 21 are open in South Africa.



2013 DAKAR TRAINING

Two of DO IT NOW's team members and Louwrens Mahoney spent a few days with Darryl Curtis and Riaan van Niekerk as they trained in the dunes of Namibia, to find out just what it takes to prepare for the world's most gruelling off-road race, the Dakar Rally. The 2013 event starts on 5 January in Peru, for the first time in its history, and finishes on 20 January in Santiago de Chile, also a first.



INTRODUCING AERIAL TOW-AT SURFING

Certain sports get inspiration from other similar sports and surfers are definitely starting to adopt radical snowboard and skateboard maneuvers into their repertoire. In terms of body boarding, body boarders have always looked for bigger, heavier waves, with a side wedge that allows them to create more speed where they will then fly into the air and do acrobatic style spins, twists and flips. Tow-at surfing allows for innovation, as surfers and body boarders have more speed, which allows for more time to do extra spins and fuller rotations, as well as test different moves easier. Find out more about this fascinating surfing style.

On the Lighter Side

SCAN HERE FOR THIS ISSUE'S JOKE AND ENJOY!

SCAN ME



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see page 11



GOPRO HERO3 WORTH R3 500

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