



Wildcoast Wildrun 112kms, 3 Days

9-11 September 2010

www.wildrun.co.za

On the 9th September, Roger and Matthew from Big Eye Branding embraced the ‘**Spirit of Big Eye**’ and took on the challenge of the Transkei by embarking on the tough Wild Run whilst making a difference to the local community by donating school bags to a local school. Here is our storey.....

A three day, 112km trail running stage race along one of the most rugged and beautiful coastlines in South Africa, the Wildcoast. The Wildrun starts at the Great Kei River and finishes at the beautiful natural wonder - The Hole-in-the-Wall. Between the two is 112km of wilderness running like nowhere else on Earth, with golden beaches, rolling hills, spectacular cliffs, wildlife, dolphins, warm sea, blue sky and friendly people.

The trip down from Durban to Kei Mouth last Wednesday was an interesting one. Driving through the Transkei is always “exciting” and this time was no different. After taking an hour to pass through Mthatha where faulty traffic lights, road works and petrol strike action brought traffic to a standstill, it was a relief to pull into the Mthatha Shell garage for a spot of carbo loading. Continuing south on the N2 it wasn’t long before my driving skills were put to test when 3 donkeys ran out in front of our double cab! I managed to accelerate and avoid a head on accident but the donkey smacked into the side of the truck and broke off the right rear wheel arch cover. We recovered the piece of plastic, the donkey was OK but at 100km/h we were very lucky to escape serious injury!

We pulled into Kei Sands at about 5 that afternoon and settled our nerves with a well earned beer or two. After the race briefing we had supper at the Green Lantern restaurant where the mood was jovial if not a little tense with various words of wisdom being shared on how to tackle the 43 kms which lay ahead the next day.

Day 1: 43kms – Kei Mouth to Kob Inn

The weather which greeted us on Thursday looked at first to be miserable, but after a few kms of running the gentle head wind and overcast conditions had a cooling effect on body. After a quick breakfast it was down to the ferry crossing to cross the Kei River to the Transkei side for the start of the 2010 Wildcoast Wildrun. Photos and final backpack checks for unwanted rocks ☺ and the next thing we were off along a stretch of vlei which was to lead us to the beach and around several headlands. With no official route and the only proper direction being “keep the sea on your right” it was up to the individual to choose what they felt was the best and most economical route from Kei Mouth to Kob Inn. It was only the race favourite and Salomon sponsored runner, Cas van Aardenne who needed bother with the race map to try and find sneaky shortcuts across the headlands and avoid the soft cambered beaches which became the norm with each and every headland. The 5 of us (Roger Fitzsimons, Matthew Fitzsimons, Paul Stephens, Andrew MacDuff and Justin Frost) soon settled into an easy pace with many photos being taken and enough time to stop and appreciate the awesome coastline of the wildcoast. After the checkpoint (19kms) at Wavecrest and a short wade through the Nxaxo mouth, it was flat hard beaches all the way till Mazeppa Bay. From Mazeppa Bay it was a short tricky traverse along some cattle trails before the final stretch of beach to the Qhora mouth crossing and into Kob Inn. The weather had by now cleared and there were many aching bodies littered about which the race physios attacked with needles and strapping. A huge buffet lunch and a soak in the pool before a much needed afternoon sleep. Just before dinner, the race day footage was shown and spot prizes for the day awarded – one of the prize winners received his prize for having a local woman overtake him on the trails!

Day 2: 35kms – Kob Inn to The Haven

For those of you who have run a standard marathon you’ll know that the last thing on your list of things to do the next day is wake up at 5:30am and run another 35kms of tough trail and beach running! It goes without saying that there were a lot of

tired looking people at the start of day two from Kob Inn to The Haven – but as was the case throughout the event the spirits were high and after the final run through of the general directions through the Dwesa Nature Reserve, it was time to hobble our way to the start line and attempt to break into a run. We chose the uphill route from the gates of Kob Inn thinking it would give us an advantage once we reached the side road at the top, but the majority of the runners chose the sneaky shortcut through the communal braai area. This novice error proved costly as we were now way back in the field. But what it did do was spark some competitive urge amongst myself Mac and Matthew as we proceeded to overtake runners in their bunches and after 5kms we were running at an average of under 6 mins/ km – on trails, beaches and rocky terrain! We were soon out of reach of the runners behind us and the kms were passing by. Though we still had time to stop and take photos, we were now in a race frame of mind – much like the rest of the runners had been yesterday. After crossing the chilly Nqabarha mouth we had a few kms of tricky headland to negotiate before entering the beautiful Dwesa Nature Reserve. After handing over our race passports at the park gates, we had a much needed stop at the checkpoint and Gu station to fill up our hydration packs. By this stage Matthew had dropped off the pace and myself and Mac set our sights on catching the 5 runners ahead of us. A steep climb up another headland and then the descent into a forest where plenty of runners got lost last year – apparently Owen (Race Director) had described the forest crossing point as a bunch of banana trees and some runners had put an extra 10 kms into their legs trying to find their way out of the forest! Last year he was told that they were in fact strelitzias and this is the description which was given to us this year – in truth they were actually palm trees but the exit route out of the forest was pretty easy to locate. Cas, race leader and eventual winner, saw 3 rhino and some zebra during this part of the run! We had by now overtaken the 5 runners ahead of us – they had taken a wrong turn but our position in the race was short lived as we made a tactical blunder in trying to follow the cattle trail too far. We had run into a marshy vlei and were forced to retrace our steps and by the time we had burst out the bush and onto the beach, the 5 runners had put some few hundred metres between us. With the finish for the day only a few kms away, we caught them at the end of a long wide beach just south of The Haven. With the race chopper overhead we scrambled past them on a sand dune and by now we were running at 5 mins/km..... thanks in part to the runner behind us who, having not seen us on day one, probably didn't want to finish behind us "backmarkers". Next was the notorious Mbashe river crossing – notorious because it reduced a few of the lady runners to tears last year and tested the race director's powers of persuasion to get them to cross with the rising tide. He later admitted that many a shark has been spotted by the chopper in the river mouth! However, our early arrival at the river mouth meant we had a battle against a very strong out flowing tide. In the interests of keeping our lead over the chasing pack we waded through without taking our shoes off – something which the top dogs do to save time. We managed to get across without any drama and made our way over the last 1.5kms to The Haven in 10th and 11th places in a time of 4hr 03 mins. It was now time for a some much needed recovery in the chilly pool whilst trying to kick start the kidneys again with some coffee.

Bob Skinstad and Ron Rutland ran the race this year in an effort to raise awareness for their [Bobs for Good Foundation](#) which is a charity drive which provides free shoes to the rural school children of South Africa. Their aim on this trip was to supply the children of Ngubenyathi primary school with school shoes. [Bigeye Branding](#) embraced this initiative by contributing school bags made from off cut banner material. A large group of us chose to help hand out the shoes to the 200 children and after a very moving acceptance speech by both the local municipal leader and school teacher (one teacher for grades 6, 7, 8 and 9!) we set about fitting the boys and girls with their new shoes. Each boy and girl was fitted with a slightly large shoe to allow for growth. We sang the national anthem with the kids and they were genuinely impressed with our knowledge of the words. It really was so rewarding to make a small difference to a community who has so little.

Day 3: 34kms – The Haven to Hole in the Wall

The final day of the "race" and by now the legs were tired and sore. But it's amazing how the mood on the start line lifts the spirits. We had decided to run the last day together and appreciate the unbelievable beauty of the wildcoast beaches and scenery. The weather was clear. After a few kms on jeep tracks in the forest we were once again on the beach and running along kms of unspoilt coastline. Day 3 was possibly the most beautiful of the 3 days with rolling headlands and steep descents into impossibly perfect bays and estuaries. The pace was slow, certainly in comparison to day 2, but largely because the terrain was that much tougher. Day 3 has double the amount of climbing compared to days 1 and 2 and whilst these walks afford one the chance to rest and take photos, it also slows your pace down considerably. But this being the Wildrun the lads were more than happy with the relaxed pace and a last chance to savour the natural beauty of the Transkei. After a series of climbs and descents between villages and streams, we crested the final headland and were greeted with undoubtedly the greatest finish of any race – Hole in the wall in perfect weather.



A gentle trot down to the finish line was all that remained and so with 112kms behind us we finished what was an unbelievable experience. With our finisher's medals and shirts we were treated to a braai and beers under the shade of the trees and a well earned swim in the ocean. Chopper flips were also on offer before we made our way back to Coffee Bay where we stayed that night. The final prize giving and summary of results was emotional for the Wildrun team and all those who helped make this an incredible event. Needless to say we had a huge party that night..... well into the early hours of the morning!

What an honour it was to experience such a beautiful part of the world and to experience such a wonderful community.