

# MERRELL ™

# ADVENTURE

## ADDICTS

## Expedition Africa, Western Cape, South Africa

9-11 May 2011

(Graham “Tweet” Bird, Tatum “Hobbit” Prins, Hanno “Smelly” Smit and Donovan “Tiny” Sims)

Various photos from Jacques Marais and Erik Vermeulen

### Graham “Tweet” Bird’s report:

Over the past few years the Merrell Adventure Addicts have competed in numerous Adventure Racing World Series Races all over the globe. When we heard in the second half of 2010 that Kinetic (Stephan and Heidi Muller) would be putting on a 500km Expedition Adventure Race here in South Africa we were tremendously excited! The last 500km expedition style race held in South Africa was in August 2008. Finally all the local Adventure Racers in South Africa could get to experience a “long” expedition style race that we so loved to do and we would be able to race in our wonderful country!!



When our team met to set our goals and objectives for 2011, Expedition Africa was highlighted as a priority together with the Adventure Racing World Championships (ARWC) in Tasmania, Australia in November 2011. We decided our year would be broken into two, with the first build up being to Expedition Africa and the second being to ARWC. Having competed in numerous Adventure Racing World Series Races around the globe, the team has gain a large amount of experience at racing these long expedition races. Through these races we had our fair share of ups and downs with some races going our way and others not. In all our team discussions in building up to Expedition Africa we felt it was time to change our normal race strategy, which had always seen us start more conservatively and come through stronger in the later stages. Though this strategy had worked well on some races it had also cost us positions in others. We decided that it was time that we tried going out



hard from the start and trying to maintain the pace through the race. The Expedition Africa was an ideal race for us to work on changing our strategy. When Kinetic announced a few weeks before the start that they expected the leaders to take approximately 54 hours, this confirmed our thoughts and made it clear that a change in strategy was needed in order to secure the top position, which we had set as our goal.

To say our preparations for Expedition Africa had gone well would be an exaggeration. Each of us had suffered setbacks through the preceding months, none more so than Tatum whom went through some hectic setbacks. But such is the support, strength and dynamics in our team that we all got through and arrived at the race in fine form and excited to be racing in South Africa again.

Aside from the fact that this race was on home soil, the pre race packing and logistical arrangements were easy compared to the previous expedition style events that we have done. This was a combination of the experience, giving us an understanding of exactly what we needed and the fact that the race

organisers, Kinetic, had made things as simple as possible for teams to just arrive at the start. They had provided the race kayaks, race boxes and the bike boxes. In addition the race registration, briefing, map and course book handout, gear checks, transition box hand-in were all well organised and structured by Kinetic in such a way to reduce the stress on us the racers and make it as painless a process as possible. By 16h00 on Sunday, a full 15 hours before race start we had completed all our preparations. This gave us a full 8 hours sleep before meeting at the race village at 05h30 on Monday, 9<sup>th</sup> May for transport to the start. This was awesome and something I don't think I have ever experienced in a race before. It allowed one to arrive at the start relaxed and well rest rather than in the usual tired and panicked state.

The race was made up of 11 legs with approximately: 127km of trekking over 5 legs; 50km paddling over 2 legs; 323km mountain biking over 4 legs. Based on the information we had been provided at the briefing, the race booklet, the maps and the Q & A session, we had produced a race guide (see

(A) TA Food X 2 - Two food packs  
 (B) TA Food X 4 - Four food packs - sleep gear.

Leg No	Disciph	Dist	Est time	Cum Tim	Box Stat	Box End	
1	Trek	14 km	1h30	01h30	/	A	
2	Paddle	26 km	3h30	02h00			
3	Trek	36 km	3h00	15h00			
4	MTB	140 km	8h00	23h00	A	B	
5	TREK	47 km	7h00	28h00	B	B	Put Trek clock in MTB Box at end
		MIDCAMP	5h00	13h00			
6	MTB	105 km	7h00	20h00	B	A	
7	TREK	23 km	5h00	01h00	A	B	Take Helmet on Trek
8	KAYAK	24 km	3h00	04h00	B	B	
9	MTB	70 km	4h30	08h30	B	-	Take Hike shoes
10	O-TREK	7 km	1h30	10h00	-	-	
11	MTB	8 km	0h30	10h30	-	-	

inserted) which we carried showing the legs and all the various information we needed in order to carry out our race strategy. We had predicted a race time of approximately 51h30. We realized this was an estimate as we were still to see the actual maps for the second half of the race.



The first paddle leg had been planned to include 8km of sea paddling from the new harbour in Hermanus, via the old harbour, to the lagoon mouth at the Grotto. Being a team that was proficient in paddling we were relishing the idea of this leg and looking forward to hopefully opening up a small margin on the other teams. On the morning of the start, the race director made the decision to cancel the sea paddling portion of the paddle due to high winds and a rough sea. Though I could understand and sympathize with the race director, I felt that by race directors in local races continually cancelling or amending paddling legs condones the fact that local

Adventure Racing teams do not get out there and train their paddling.

Our race got off to a great start and we had built up a ten minute lead by the end of the first two legs. On the third leg, which mentally was the toughest for me with a flat 15km gravel road run followed by 15km beach run, we ran out of water and were all a bit dehydrated at the end of the beach when we found a cottage for some water. Again the team managed this and we arrived at the end of the third leg with a 13 minute lead. Heading out into the night on the 140km MTB, the team was in good spirits. Following a short two minute stop for some food and map changing, I made a very stupid navigational error. I completely missed a simple turn only realizing 6km and a major downhill later. After a quick review of the situation we decided to rather alter our planned route and get the next CP from the other direction. This was devastating for the team and I must thank my team mates for their understanding and support with error. They just accepted it and got on with the task of minimizing our loses. We went from having a 10 min lead to being 35mins behind. Following this we also began paying for our earlier pace on the 50km of trekking on the opening legs and began slowing down. A quick 15min power nap solved this and we finished the MTB 55min behind Cyanosis and 15 mins behind Accelerate. This motivated us to get out of transition fast and onto the 47km trekking leg which we felt was going to be one of the defining legs of the race. A good route choice to the first CP saw us pass Accelerate. From this point you could either take a slightly longer route, heading down off the ridge on a jeep track and using the paths and roads on the valley floor to get across to where you headed back into the mountains for the next CP or your could stay up on the ridge line bush whacking across to the point. We chose the former. This worked out well for us with Cyanosis popping out just behind us after the next CP having chosen the ridge option. Over the remainder of the leg we continued with our consistent pace arriving at mid camp after 31 hours of



racing and with a 1h04 lead over Cyanosis and 3h46 over Accelerate. Feeling refreshed and in good spirits after the 5 hour stop we agreed that we would continue with our consistent pace and aim to extent the gap to the chasing teams. We did this fantastically and had opened the gap to 2h30 by the end of the paddle leg and finally finishing the race with a 3 hour lead over Cyanosis and 05h56 lead over Accelerate. As we had expected the 47km trekking leg had proved decisive in the race. We managed to be two hours quicker than the chasing teams which I believe was pivotal in us setting up race victory.

The race route, though seeming easy at first glance, turned out to be challenging and well worthy of an expedition adventure race. The speed at which the legs were raced made it challenging for the top and experienced teams while the navigation, terrain and length of the legs made it challenging for the novice and slower teams. All 22 teams that started the race crossed the finish line, with some doing short course, some missing a member and some missing a few CP's. This is a wonderful achievement and congratulations must go to all that crossed the finish line! Hopefully the seed for true expedition style adventure racing has been planted and we will continue to see the numbers attempting and finishing these long races grow.



I always find myself learning something new about myself in these races. You hit rock bottom, you go through heaven and hell, you see dark places within yourself, you go through highs and lows, you feel so broken you can't continue, you feel joy and happiness and ultimately a huge sense of achievement upon completing the course and the feeling that you can do anything you set your mind to! I hope this race has allowed a new batch of adventure racers out there to discover this and the old seasoned racers to rediscovery their passion for the sport.

The organisation of Kinetics' Stephan and Heidi Muller and their team was top class, making this race one of the best organised races I have been to. They have the necessary passion, drive and experience and this comes through in all the finer details that make their races world class. Bring on May 2012 and Expedition Africa 2012!

Our teams strong bond and understanding for one another was instrumental in the team working brilliantly together to race at a consistently fast pace and recover from the navigational and dehydration issues along the route. We continually worked as a team ensuring that we assisted one another through each's bad patches. To quote from one of Hanno's mails to the team after the race: *"Thanks for the great race and for Hobbit encouraging me to vomit one more time to empty my gut! That was team work at its best I'd say..."* We had one of our best races ever with just about everything going right. This was refreshing after our last race in Spain where everything just seemed to go wrong. So how can you manage things so they always go right?? As always it is an honor



and privilege to race with three of my closest and dearest friends! Thank you Tatum, Hanno and Donovan for another wonderful shared experience.

**Tatum “Hobbit” Prins report:**

One would think that after so many races you don’t take away as much from them anymore. They are so unbelievably wrong. You can race 1000 races and still every single one of them you will take away something...

For me this race was a very important one. After a pretty rough start to the year and not much racing, deliberating whether I should or should not be racing and all the emotions that go with that I needed this race to be a great one. My body, mind and soul were craving the feeling I get when I get out there and race with “my boys.”

Standing on the start line in Hermanus I have never felt more nervous for a race before. I tried to pretend to all around me I was fine, you know, “I’m such a old hat at this why would this affect me so much now?” I was so worried I was going to let the team down, not so much physically but more mentally and this played on me the whole race. Before each new leg started I would share with one of my team mates just how scared I was, was I suddenly going to crack and lose the plot? I so hoped not and as each leg was completed I felt more and more relief and more confident about my abilities. The weight that lifted off my shoulders as the race went on was indescribable.



The race started hard and fast, just what we expected. We ran at high speed around the town and surrounding mountains collecting points. (Nothing like a quick 14km’s to get the heart pumping and legs burning.) We finished that 1<sup>st</sup> leg right with Cyanosis. We knew then the first couple of legs were going to be tight and to make a break was going to be near impossible. We hopped on the boats hoping to gain some time on them but little did we know we were in for quite a paddle. The headwind was strong. The waves it caused were so big that Tiny and I who were sitting in the front of the boats took huge strain with the cold. Just a couple hours into the race and already the thought of hyperthermia popped into my mind. It was crazy! Wow – what a start! We didn’t waste any time hopping off the boat. We started on our 36km running leg but again it didn’t take long to start singing “hello darkness my old friend’. We ran along this long monotonous gravel road for what felt like an age. We knew we had Cyanosis right on our tails so there was no room for even a second’s break (I even considered peeing while I was running!!) I was pretty thankful when we hit the beach, the cool wind made a difference and the change of scenery did wonders for the mind. It was also great to suddenly find ourselves what felt like the middle of nowhere and just the 4 of us.

It was on this leg we ran into our first set back. Even with all our years experience we decided to skimp on water, go lighter which hopefully means go faster. Big mistake! We ran out of water which resulted in Smelly vomiting on the side of the road with dehydration. At a point like this there is nothing you can do but just sit tight, offer support and help in any way and hope the team behind are not catching. I remember looking back and hoping not to see them but it didn't take long and our Smelly was back on his feet.

Ten minutes into transition we got our first surprise of the race. Team Accelerate had over taken Cyanosis and were in great spirits. That got us going. We headed out on the 140km mountain bike and swore we would remain consistent on the ride and hopefully hold our lead. Next mistake...with all the adrenalin and excitement we missed a vital turn which cost us about 35min. Suddenly we went from 1<sup>st</sup> place to 3<sup>rd</sup>.



Arriving at the next transition we were 45min behind Cyanosis and 15min behind Team Accelerate. "OK we can do this!!" This was going to be a tricky navigational section and depending on our route choice we could maybe make up some time. We did just that. As the sun was rising we turned around to see Cyanosis walking up the road behind us. "Game on!" (I wanted to give Tweet a big smacker of a kiss!)

From this point on we continued to keep our lead but we have a saying in our team, "It ain't over till the fat lady sings." Throughout the rest of the race we continued to race as hard and as consistently as we could knowing that at any moment something could change.

Only once we arrived at the final leg which was a 7km orienteering section did we start to feel that we almost had it in the bag. No one wanted to say it but our excitement was building. Eventually after 500km's, 61 hours nonstop racing, 3 hours sleep, we crossed the line in first place. There is no better feeling in the world. We achieved what we set out to do!



As wonderful as it was to win this race and as great as it was to achieve this, this is not what I took out of it. For me this race was about all the novice racers out there who came to do this race to challenge themselves mentally and physically. To push themselves to the limits for the first time. It was a great inspiration to see these teams cross the finish line knowing just how much it took them to get there, the high's and low's they would have experienced. The friendships made and the real life adventure they had. We are such a privileged group of people to do what we do, to have the

opportunity to learn so much about ourselves and experience so much.

A huge thank you to Stephan and Heidi for a brilliant event so well thought out and organized. We salute you and are forever grateful for you putting big AR races back on the map in SA. It makes us so proud to be a part of it.

To my 3 best friends, thank you again for yet another race, another week, another time spent together experiencing life and adventure as only we know how. Thank you for making me feel so safe and forever being by my side in and out of racing.



Lastly a massive well done to everyone who got to the start line and conquered Expedition Africa!!! See you there again next year!

Over and out.  
Hobs.



#### **Donovan “Tiny” Sims report:**

Monday 9<sup>th</sup> May had the Addicts at the start of the first Expedition Africa 500km Adventure race. This was one of the high lights of our calendar year and a race that we had “tagged” for a win (I know, no pressure right). We had done the training needed and felt really confident about the race.

We started with a 15 km run that took us through Hermanus , collecting check points in and around town, and ended on the beach where we had our first transition, from foot to boat.

The whole paddle was into the teeth of the wind, and with Hobbit and I sitting in front of the boats we got to experience the “uncut” version of the race. This was for me the toughest section of the race, I got so cold I was having trouble moving my jaw muscles, but we pushed through and managed to open a small lead between the chasing teams.

The next trekking leg was fast as we ran the WHOLE way; we did manage to run out of water for about an hour but met up with an angel and a hose pipe. That sorted that problem out. We ran into the next transition having opened the lead a little more.

Next we where onto the 140km bike, other than a small nav error (we were all having too much fun and missed the turn) which cost us two positions this leg went really well.

We left the next transition on foot, 45mins behind Cyanosis and 15mins behind the UK team. Thanks to some great nav'ing by Captain Tweet, we caught and left these two teams before the compulsory 5hr stop. Here we ate and recovered and had some really "gross" looking stuff rubbed onto our legs (which by the way WORKED SO WELL). We had a couple hours snooze and were ready to leave with 4mins to spare.



From here on the race was pretty much a blur to me, we raced really well pushing and encouraging each other all the way. We made a few good decisions at the right times and this made the 105km bike, the 20km paddle (fighting sleep monsters all the way), the 70km bike and the 7km orienteering course fly by.

The orienteering took us 1h45, and having finished before any other team had arrived to start, we knew we had this race in the bag. The Hobbit lead us to the finish 8kms away, and I must say, I was really struggling to hold back the emotions on that last bit, this win meant so much to me and my team mates on so many levels.

I remember standing under the finishing banner with my team and having this overwhelming feeling of accomplishment, thanks guys.

To Stephan and Heidi, I really feel that you guys have out done yourselves with this AMAZING event, WELL DONE.

Merrell, our sponsor, thanks for making racing for you so much easier. We looked and felt like a team. The shoes on the trekking legs, again, impressed so much. Thanks for all you done for us.

The Black Diamond headlights were brilliant, especially the ICON, great product.

PVM thanks for the fuel that keeps us going, I never get tired of eating or drinking your products.

Last but by no means least to MY teammates. Before I joined you guys you were always the team I wanted to beat but that was because YOU were the team I wanted to be. Tweet, always keeping it real and playing a real captains role. Hobbit, I am sure you are tired of being called the glue that keeps our team together but that really does describe you best , I have never raced with any "girl" as strong as you were this race, great race. Smelly, you legend, always there to pick up the pieces and to offer some words of wisdom in your own special way. Thanks guys, you really made this my best race to date. Can't wait to "GET OUTSIDE" with you guys again.



Tiny

**Hanno “Smelly” Smit’s report:**

Wow, our first local expedition style AR since 2008! It was very exciting to see all the new faces and all the new teams arriving in Hermanus full of excitement and commitment for this long awaited racing adventure.

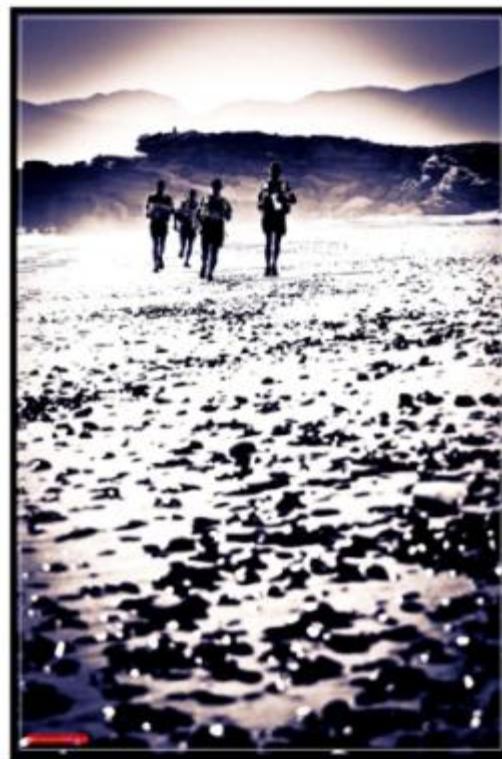
The other exciting aspect about this race was the novel idea of filming our team in real time whilst racing! I certainly cannot recall having ever witnessed an adventure racing team being filmed continuously for the duration of a race of this length. Andrew King and Zayne Botha from D4 Productions covered all the bases and one has to commend them on this feat, which was not only a huge physical challenge, but also a logistical challenge second to none.

The race kicked off in great weather from the historical old harbour in Hermanus. We went hard and completed this leg with Cyanosis, where we jumped into our boats into a gusting Easterly towards Stanford. The two front paddlers took a lot of water onto them and resulted in them being hypothermic, but still able to continue running towards Gansbaai for the next leg. On this hiking leg we took far too little water with us and it resulted in us being radically dehydrated by the time we reached civilization and water. I drank a huge quantity of water in a matter of a minute or two and this resulted in me getting a blown up stomach, which soon turned into vomiting- a word that makes me shiver when it comes to racing as I know far too well the consequences of vomiting: slow recovery and guaranteed cramping. This was exactly what lay ahead of me for the night.

When we reached the sandy tracks down at the coast around Quin Point, the pace dropped off slightly and I managed to drink more liquid and take in critical salt replacements than what I was expending. This meant a much faster recovery for me and our team started speeding up again going into the big mountain trek, but with an hour deficit to the leading Cyanosis.

We knew that the 47km mountain trek was going to be the defining leg in the race and we therefore put in a concerted effort. Our route up the mountain was different to the two teams ahead of us, Cyanosis and the British team, Accelerate. We aimed at staying on jeep track for as long as possible and as much as possible and on reaching the second control point of this leg we had already passed both teams in front of us. From here on to the midway camp we opened up another hour on Cyanosis, with Accelerate about another two hours behind Cyanosis.

This lead only opened up gradually from here onwards. The next bike leg was another fast district road ride and was followed by another shorter mountain hike where we would end up spending our only sleep of around 10 minutes (other than the midway camp sleep) and then descended into the gorge for an exciting bit of kloofing, hereafter we entered the town of Villiersdorp and the



venue for the last paddling leg on the Theewaterskloof dam. Beautiful paddling conditions lead to a comfortable and unrushed paddle and then followed by a final 70km district road ride to the Hemel en Aarde valley, where the race concluded with a short orienteering run.

To all the other teams who were out there competing in this race: hats off to you all for finishing your first big one and to those old hands: hats off for doing it in such modesty.

Our team has set ourselves a number of important races during the year, which culminates with the AR World Series Champs in Tasmania in November. This race we had earmarked as one of the important stepping stones for the year and our goal was not only to win this race, but to race it confidently and boldly. This we achieved in grand style and make us even more confident in our charge for the World Champs.

Smell

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