



The logo features the name 'McCain' in a stylized white font on a black rectangular background with a yellow border. Below this, the word 'ADVENTURE' is written in large, bold, black, distressed letters. Underneath 'ADVENTURE', the word 'ADDICTS' is written in red, distressed letters inside a yellow, hand-drawn rectangular box. To the right of the text is a yellow graphic of a dragon or a similar mythical creature.

Salomon UGE 220km AR - 24 to 27 Jan 2008

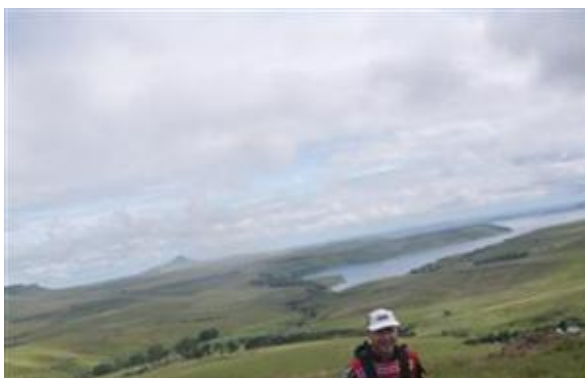
(Graham Bird, Tatum Prins, Andre Gie, Hanno Smit)

Written by Graham Bird

You know when you drive through Harrismith on your way to or from KZN, there are all those impressive mountains, cliffs, dams and scenery? As an outdoor enthusiast, they have always fascinated me and I have always wanted to go and “play” in them.

Well this past weekend we finally got our chance. UGE Events, together with Nicholas Mulder, put together a fantastic adventure race in the area. The “Salomon UGE AR” included two distances, a 150km race for the not so experienced and a 220km race for the old hands. The event kicked off with an impressive photo presentation of what lay ahead, as well as a very brief and well organized race briefing on Thursday evening. Each team received a well laid out and very informative course book, which included all the route instructions, kit lists and race rules. It was also revealed that pre-plotted maps would only be handed out at the start of each leg. This made for a welcomed change and meant no late night plotting. Early to bed and some decent sleep the night before a race.....yeeehaaaa!!!

The 220km race involved 9 legs, which started with a paddle across Sterkfontein Dam; followed by a trek in the foothills around the dam; It was then onto the bikes for a 87km MTB; followed by a trek in the mountains around Swinburne; a paddle down the Wilge River into the town of Harrismith; a short MTB into the Platberg reserve to the start of an orienteering section; it was then back on the bikes for a bike push up and down Platberg and onto the final trekking leg to finish at a picturesque resort at the base of Mount Everest. 48km of paddling, 55km of trekking and 120km of MTB.



Even the race start was a competitor friendly 07h00 on Friday morning. After a brief sprint up the hill to collect our maps we headed out onto the choppy waters of Sterkfontein dam to collect the required checkpoints. Once we crossed the main section of the dam and headed into the calmer waters of the bays, we were amazed at the awesome pale blue colour of the water. The fisherman on our team, Hanno, was keen to stop for some fishing!! A few km's from the end of paddle we broke the rudder cable on one of our boats. This made for some interesting paddling to the transition and left us wondering how



we were going to fix it knowing that we had not bought any boat spares with us!! The next hike proved to be very easy under foot, with the vegetation being predominantly grass, with plenty of flowers in bloom, making it very beautiful. With us only getting our maps for the legs at the start of each leg, it meant making quick route choices. We decided on heading up onto the ridgeline. The other McCain team (“McCain Adventure Fanatics”) decided to stay along the bottom, only ascending at the last moment. This proved to be quicker and they managed to reduce our 10 min lead at the end of the paddle to just 4 mins. We however managed to pull this out to 20mins again by the end of the trek.

It was then onto the MTB for a monster cycle. The majority of the cycle was done on district roads with one section, where we descended 400m off the escarpment on a cattle trodden jeep track. Much to our delight the 400m climb back up the other side was

on a tarred district road. By this time the afternoon heat and the relentless pace set by Andre had kicked in and we crawled up the climb. Once at the top of the climb we had marked a route that would have seen us descending 300m to the valley floor, only to climb back out on cattle tracks. We stopped to review our options at the top of the mountain and then decided on riding the longer but flatter option around. It also meant that we were able to stop at the local shebeen for some ice cold cokes!! This change in route choice proved to be a wise decision, finding out later in the race that all the teams behind us had descended into the valley and had a long and hard bike carry out. Our misfortune of equipment failure continued, with Andre’s dropout on his rear derailleur breaking 2km from the Transition. Without having a spare, we again were left wondering how to mend the broken dropout.

After the some pizza, we headed out in the evening for the next trekking leg. After a ropework section of some boulder climbing and abseiling it was off into the night around the turtle shaped mountain you always see on the drive past Harrismith. After the plain sailing that we had experienced on the first three legs, this leg proved to be tougher. The path that we had chosen to follow was very overgrown or non-existent in places, which made for slow going. The mist while looking for the checkpoint on the top of the mountain also proved difficult, with us being unable to see where to ascend between all the cliffs. We spend over 3 hours searching for ways to climb the mountain top to clip the CP. Once this was done, the remainder of the hike proved stunning; with the almost full moon lighting up the way once we had descended out of the mist. 9 hours of trekking for 18km’s!!!

After a leisurely transition, we headed off onto the river paddle. Thanks to Alan Neate and our second, Rob Gie the rudder cable had been mended. After a few exciting rapids in the first half of the paddle, the remainder of the paddle was spent winding down the Wilge River into Harrismith, a stinking carcass adding a lot of excitement to Tatum just before the end of the paddle. As this was going to be the last time we would see our second, we had a good feed before loading up for the





last few legs of the race.

It was a short MTB through Harrismith into the forests at the base of the table mountain. Again Alan Neate had come to our rescue and turned Andre's bike into a single speed!! We left our bikes and set off on a 7km orienteering course where we had to get 6 controls out of a possible 10. We managed this with relative ease, much to the surprise of the marshals at the Transition. It was then onto our MTB's for a hectic leg, involving a 400m ascent of the Platberg via Donkey Pass, before descending off the mountain via a hiking trail, Zig Zag Pass. So a bike push up and a bike push down, before finally heading into the last transition of the race. We dumped the bikes and headed off for the last 5km trek that took us via some cliffs for another climbing and abseiling experience onto the finish at the Mount Everest chalets.

After a wonderful race we crossed the finish line after 33h05 of racing, six hours ahead of

the other McCain team.

A special word of thanks to UGE events, Nicholas Mulder, Salomon, Gravity Training and all the marshals, helpers and sponsors for a great race. Certainly one of the best in recent times. Also thanks to our second Robert Gie.

The McCain Adventure Addicts wish to thank the following team sponsors who support our adventurous lifestyles:

- McCain - For supporting our active lifestyles
- PVM - For providing us with nutritional products to keep us going.
- Giant Bicycles - For providing the team with exceptional Anthem mountain bikes
- Salomon - For the top class footwear
- Island Tribe - For protecting us from the harsh African sun.
- Squirt - For keeping our Bikes lubed and operating smoothly!