



## G4 National Selections - Lesotho - 9 to 15 October 2008

*(McCain Adventure Addicts: Graham Bird, Tatum Prins, Andre Gie, Jeannette Walder & Ryan Hodierne)*

*By Ryan Hodierne*

Picture this: a week long traverse of the aptly named “Mountain Kingdom” - Lesotho, in bright Orange Land Rover Discovery 3's with top adventure brand sponsors logo's riddled down the side, 6 action packed days that comprised of on average 6 - 8 tasks a day, ranging from mountain biking, trail or rather mountain running, flat & white water paddling, abseiling, rock climbing, rope ascending (jumar), compass & GPS navigation, with some proper off-road driving, rounded off with good deeds to the local communities that were passed through.

Certainly sounds out of this world... it was. It was a setting that any adventurer would dream about & for 20 of us fortunate enough to have been chosen for the National selections, this was a reality!

Looking at the names in amongst the 20 finalists were very well known names in paddling, adventure racing & multi-sport circles, & individuals that I personally have looked up to for the past few years. Only thing was, I was now rubbing shoulders with them & competing against them for a chance to make it through to the G4 International Selections to be held in Scotland with a Scottish Castle as the back drop. The McCain Addicts were well represented, with Andre Gie, Graham Bird, Jeanette Walder, Tatum Prins & Ryan Hodierne all making it through to this round.

The lead up to National selections was nail biting, very little was said about what we could expect & what they had in store for us? Eventually, on 9 October the time had arrived, we were all to meet at the domestic arrivals terminal at O.R Tambo International Airport. As competitors arrived, it became a bit of a reunion as old friends & new ones met at the





Regional selections gathered with excitement & suspense, not knowing what to expect.

Day 1

Once everyone had arrived, we were whisked off by shuttle to a beautiful guest farm bordering the quaint little town of Clarens. Stepping off the bus, we were met by the awesome & greatly respected team of Magnetic South who had arranged & laid out the grueling week that lay ahead. Having done our rounds, Chester Foster from Land Rover Gear bombarded us with loads of kit that even out did my Christmas wish lists to Father Christmas all these years! Realizing then how fortunate we were to be the select few, it hit home that we were soon to experience the time of our lives, & an event that very little if anything could compare to.

We were treated to a buffet lunch that all the competitors took advantage of & while feeding our faces, Mark Collins from Magnetic South gave us a run down on what was expected of us & vital safety precautions we had to adhere to. With full tummies, the 20 finalists were rounded up and lead onto a military Saamel truck with all our kit. With 30min to go to our destination, the truck stopped & we were ordered to put blind folds on for what was to be a bumpy 4x4 drive into the mountains surrounding Fouriesberg. Finally we had arrived at the most amazing site I've seen in years, Destiny Castle, perched up on the edge of a sand stone cliff over-looking the rolling hills leading into the mountain kingdom of Lesotho.

With little time to take in the scenery, each competitor was called off individually & issued a race bib with our name on it, together with a Fluid Solo kayak & Land Rover mountain bike that were ours to put through their paces & maintain throughout the duration of the event. The female competitors were issued Land Rover Discovery 3's matching their bib number, where the male competitors got paired up with one of the girls & were to swap around each morning as allocated by the selectors, this felt much like a "swingers club", the girls found this very amusing.

Having organized ourselves in our pairs, one-by-one we were lead to the entrance of Destiny Castle, there we were met by a genuine knight in shining armor who took us through a little trap door which lead into a room where all the chief selectors were sitting, I giggled nervously, sat down & after an uncomfortable silence, was asked: "Ryan, why have we selected you as one of the G4 finalists?" This was a very daunting experience!

Still overwhelmed by what had happened from the moment we arrived, we soldiered on to our first task, The Siege of Destiny Castle. This task, a team task, involved GPS navigation on bike & on foot within the vicinity of the castle, finishing off with a rock climb up toward the castle. This proved to be challenging, as all competitors were still disorientated as to where we were exactly, so it was going to be a long, dark & lonely night out.

The majority of the events & tasks that lay ahead were predominantly individual, but due to the new format of the International G4 selections, selecting both a male & female representative from each country, many of the events were in a team format which required the mixed pairs to join forces & conquer the tasks together. This format was to be very exciting throughout the event, as strong competition developed amongst the paired teams.



On task completion, competitors were instructed to meet in the dining hall for the official welcoming & opening of the National G4 selections. Competitors, sponsors & media gathered for a feast within the castle, a treat many competitors dubbed, “the Last Supper”. That night we headed to a cave where we would get a decent bit of shut eye prior to the action packed day that lay ahead.



## Day 2

With an early start to the day, we were woken up to a spectacular view over the hills & rivers that we would compete in that day. After a scenic drive through the little town of Fouriesberg, we headed off-road & into a hilly, jagged area that marked the spot for our first 3 tasks.



Starting the competition off, was the Maluti Matrix, a special task, followed by some running, jumaring, caving & kloofing navigation, and then, a flat water kayak race that involved some scary seal launches into the river & around some buoys.

From there, we were off to the angry & chilly waters of the Ash River for some serious white water kayaking in the Fluid Solo's through a marked slalom course that the Olympic K2 pair usually train on. After an effortless demonstration from some of the top paddlers around, it was our turn to try tame the raging waters of the Ash. This wasn't going to happen, as my trip down the course will be remembered for the rest of my life & was probably my most memorable experience the whole trip. Much to my amazement, I made it down with a clean run & was still upright through the last gate, unbelievable!?

Heading through the same raging waters, next we had to race each other down the course then take-out & portage for a 2km stretch back to where the cars were parked, very tiring & it was only the 2nd day! The final task for the day had competitor's abseiling down a steep cliff face in the dark & navigating through thick bushes running over loose terrain to gather 8 checkpoints along the way down to the campsite below.

## Day 3

We were up again at sparrows for some mental preparation for the day that lay ahead, & what better way to start the day off than a strenuous 3 lap mountain run meandering through the surrounding hills. Day 3 was to be run in a rotation format, where each pod, 2 Discovery's & the pod leader in a Defender, were to find their way to each of 5 tasks using the Garmin GPS to navigate to each point. The competitions comprised of mountain biking skills & endurance, confusing image orienteering, hairy 4x4 driving on a cliff & a welcoming refuel at the local petrol station, what

a relief.

Once the rotations were completed, we headed off in convoy to the campsite at Oxbow for that evening. Not done yet, we had an alpine style mountain bike race at 3000m above sea level, that headed straight up an almost vertical tarred mountain pass only to turn around & speed straight back down at break neck pace.

In the evening, we had an emotional medal ceremony around the campfire with a send off for the media & sponsors who would leave us for others to fill in for the rest of the event, unlucky for them.

#### Day 4

We had a chilly start to the day, with a traverse across a gorge followed by a cliff jump into Lesotho mountain water then a paddle over a rock feature & through a river course, this task was named the “Oxy More Run”, interesting... Some paddling followed, that ran in knock-out format, with strength & skills both playing a role. We then proceeded through the highest motoring pass in the Southern Hemisphere, passing the Afri-Ski resort & Into Thin Air, our next orienteering task.

From there it was onto “blind date”, which involved some very tricky blindfolded driving under instruction. A very bumpy & steep mountain bike ride followed as we neared the Katse dam. After a spectacular off-road drive through the hill tops of Lesotho, competitors were faced with a multi adventure, this would comprise of an abseil off a bridge with a short swim to the Fluid Solo's on the bank, then a longish paddle to take out & a run up a very steep switch back track to a contour path &

back down to the start finish, tough stuff!

That evening, it was down to some precision driving, where we had to penetrate a slotted target with a so called spear on the front of the vehicle. A lot of tactical thinking was required in this task, with functions in the vehicle coming into play.

#### Day 5

One of the shorter days, but by no means easy... we began the day with a multi adventure, abseiling off a 25m bridge with a boat & paddle attached. We had to carefully abseil ourselves into the boat, detach ourselves & paddle in zigzag, in & out between the bridge pillars, with a little run to conclude.

Some team work was required in the very well thought of driving task that followed, negotiating the direction of 2 vehicles, one moving forward & the other in reverse.

Then for the speed merchants, an enjoyable next task that day, it was based on the same principle as the flags in life-saving training, with a little bit of musical chairs & knock-out coming into play. Two orienteering tasks followed, one with compass navigation & the other using a GPS to measure distance, where the main aim of the task was to get the shortest distance between points. That evening the campsite was alongside a trickling river in a majestic setting surrounded by the towering hills of Lesotho.

#### Day 6

Day 6, the final day of competition, & was the one day that had been lurking in the back of each competitors mind as it was by far the most action packed day within the schedule, comprising of 8 competitions for the day. Scary mountain bike riding on near vertical climbs & descents, with some tricky orienteering tasks, one involving the completion of a Sudoku puzzle to determine the order of the points to collect & the other well named "Peeping Tom" orienteering task situated within & around an inhabited little Basutho village. The special task was Human Foosball, a very well thought out task that involved the whole team, each person being attached to a winch cable & only allowed to move sideways & not forward or backwards.

The team rope task that followed proved to be a stunner, again involving a good bit of team work within each pod of 4 competitors, racing to jumar up a rope, traverse across a gorge, rock climb back up the cliff side to a short run & into a slippery abseil down a mossy waterfall.



From here, we traveled to the well known Black Mountain pass, driving down it not realizing we were to head back up it on our bikes shortly after. All cars were parked in a circular formation for the next task, we started off with a strenuous bike ride back up the pass, turned around & headed back to the cars to swap wheels for shoes, then headed up the highest mountain in the vicinity & back down to the cars, where we were to memorize 2 pairs of cars with matching sponsors logos in the engine bay. Not easy thinking on your feet after all that. Here I was amazed at the strength each person demonstrated throughout this task, no one gave up at any stage!



The final task for the day & for the entire G4 event, "The Fox Wears Pajamas", required each mixed pair to cover a 6km distance

to Sani Top Chalets as quickly as possible, with one mountain bike between each team. This task was exhausting as it was incredibly difficult to gauge distance & efficiency over the course, working hard on the run & trying to catch your breath on the bike. The end venue at Sani Top proved to be the most welcoming site competitors could see, this marked the end of the most grueling but amazing event in Adventure Sports history.

The evening marked the closing of the event, with a large spread of scrumptious food & flowing drinks, it was all so well deserved & tasted better than ever. Both Mark Collins & Roland Reid closed off with very moving speeches which certainly touched the hearts of each and every person in the room.

Each competitor played a large role in making it such an incredible experience, and many many thanks need to go out to the organizers of a truly spectacular event, Magnetic South, what an unbelievable team of people. Then to each sponsor, without you the event would not have been possible, it truly was an honour to put your equipment to the ultimate test within such a demanding event.

An extra special thanks to Roland & the Land Rover team, your passion toward the event shone out in every word spoken & it spurred each competitor on to give it their utmost at each & every task, thank you so very much for everything.

Well done to Tatum Prins for being awarded the G4 Spirit Award, you certainly deserve it (waking up to the Johnny Clegg song on radio G4 the final morning, certainly closed the deal, that's the spirit!)

Congratulations to Jeannie & Hanlie you girls were awe inspiring & to Richard & Craig, well done guys, you're machines. I know the four of you will hold the flag high, & show the rest of them how it's done, for sure.

To all competitors, it was an honour to race with each & everyone of you, I certainly gained so much respect for each of you, I was blown away by the potential you all demonstrated at every single task, both physically & mentally, very well done to you all.

Happy Adventures

