



## **Imana Wild Ride 2007**

### **“Out there alone, racing the tide”**

**Stu Rawlinson and James Lea-Cox**

The Imana Wild Ride is a 200 km mountain bike race extending along the Wild Coast from Kei Mouth in the south to Umngazi River Bungalows in the North over a four day period. Mountain bikers race in pairs and basically have to make their way along the coastline between designated overnight hotel stops. There is a route for those in the know, but a lack of route markings and vague route cards ensures that a degree of opportunist navigation is required. The race schedule is as follows:

Day 1: Kei Mouth to Kob Inn

Day 2: Kob Inn to The Haven

Day 3: The Haven to Ocean View, Coffee Bay

Day 4: Coffee Bay to Umngazi River

Bungalows

The Wild Ride is pretty much an elite MTB Race. Due to the limited number of entrants allowed, it is very very difficult to actually enter the race. In fact, the current waiting list extends for 10 years! As such, when an opportunity of a week of lapping up the best of the Wild Coast has to offer

presents itself; you drop everything and say YES. Stu Rawlinson, with the gift of gab and 5 years of incessant rusting on the waiting list, somehow organised a team entry for this years Imana Wild Ride less than a week before the event. He was on the phone in a flash to organise a willing team member and, I guess, I said yes first.



So with the horrible feeling of a slowly depreciating leave quoting finally abating, Stu and I packed up the vehicle on a quite Sunday afternoon and headed for the Eastern Cape. Our first stop was Hilton for some quality shrimp curry and a place to sleep at Stu's girlfriend's house. On the Monday we rose before the sun peeked over the horizon and headed to Underberg. Just out of Underberg we had a front tyre blow out. A quick change has us in Kokstad for breakfast and the promise of a new tyre. In the end neither Kokstad nor Umtata had the required tyre! Solution: Buy a second hand tyre that is too big for the car. Solution 2: When you buy a new car, consider the availability and the cost of replacement tyres.

As the Wild Ride is a bit of a logistical nightmare, a degree of creativity is required to get one to the start and have a car at the finish line. Our plan? Get Stu's uncle to join us on the drive to Kei Mouth. Then get him to drive the car back to Kokstad and then to Point Edward. After the race, catch a lift with a willing physiotherapist (Luke Simmons) to Point Edward, pick up the car and head home. Simple!

We arrived in Kei Mouth by means of the local ferry, which at R50 per vehicle is worse than most toll gates, but quite entertaining to say the least. A quick drive through town had us at our chosen accommodation... Well what can I say... Nice view. The briefing that evening was presented at the Kei Mouth Community Hall where the entrants were treated to fantastic goodie boxes (note: not bags) and supper. Thereafter, we were regaled with tales of the wild coastline, the suggested route and what to do

by race directors Steven Stamp and Glen Haw. Max Cluer dropped the odd comment here and there.

With the briefing complete, the both of us cycled back to our rondavel and whilst ensuring optimal bike performance discovered a crack in the swing arm of Stu's bike. Not a good sign. The problem was solved with a hefty section of wire clothes line and a few cable ties. Two leathermans were nearly broken in the process.

### **Day 1: Kei Mouth to Kob Inn**

- o 43km
- o 3 hours 13 minutes
- o 600 meters ascent

The start of the race was on the opposite side of the Kei River, so all entrants were packed into the ferry for a slow river crossing. A mass start ensued at 08h00 up sunrise hill which had the lungs bursting and the legs burning. Stu and I then headed inland as the normal route along the beach had been negatively affected during the recent storms in the area. All was going well until I lost Stu. I waited a while on the



beach but eventually assumed that there was a possibility that he had taken a “sneak” and overtaken me. I continued on the beach before catching up with Shaun Biggs and Graeme Pope-Ellis. Eventually, I located Stu at the first major river crossing. As a team again, we progressed over various hiking and 4x4 trails past Wavecrest Hotel and on to Cebe via a hard pack beach front. From the Cebe cottages we headed inland again towards Mazeppa Bay. One last river crossing, which only required some wading skills, had us on the lawn at Kob Inn and refreshing iced tea. The remainder of the afternoon was spent relaxing and enjoying the Kob Inn hospitality!

### **Day 2: Kob Inn to The Haven**

- o 45km
- o 3 hours 1 minute
- o 395 meters ascent

The Day 2 start was in batch form with the top ten teams starting individually at 2 minute intervals, followed by batches of 14 teams. Team McCain headed off in the first batch behind the top 10. The initial sections of the route were along the beach until we had to wade across the Shixini River. The 10 or so kilometres thereafter were a mixture of on and off beach riding. In places, the beach sand was far from ideal, which resulted in much pushing and cursing. The first major river crossing was at Nqabara where we realised how well a bike actually floats... and how strong the current flows at low tide! From the near drowning escapade we encountered Mother No. 1. A hill you have to carry your bike up on your back. Riding is not an option. With No. 1 behind us, we entered the Dwesa Nature Reserve and Rhino



valley. The final obstacle of the day was the Mbashe River. A river renowned for Zambezi sharks. Lucky for us our arrival was timed perfectly and we were able to pretty much cycle through the river. A short uphill from the beach had us at the finish line at The Haven. Unfortunately, the hotel did not have the capacity to host all the entrants so many were housed in ex-Sani2c tentage. No complaint! The hotel pool formed a central part of the rest of the day as most gathered on its edge to consume numerous fermented beverages.

### **Day 3: The Haven to Ocean View, Coffee Bay**

- o 46km
- o 3 hours 43 minutes
- o 1355 meters ascent

Day 3 of the Imana Wild Ride proved to be a tough day for the Addicts route wise. We started well up towards the lighthouse and then on to various trails and roads in the indigenous coastal bush. Then things fell apart slightly. After crossing the

Xora River we lost contact with the group ahead who obviously knew the route. We, being race rookies, had no idea where to go except along the coast line. A right turn was taken instead of a left and soon we ended up on various cattle and goat tracks with not a tyre print in sight. Still we pressed ahead until we saw some cyclists on the beach in the distance. We quickly raced towards them and realised they were from the batch behind us! We stuck together from this point heading up Mother No. 2, 3 and 4 before

arriving at the famed Hole in the Wall. Luckily the river was low so we crossed it with ease and headed past the Hotel along the district road to Coffee Bay. Two large hills had us speeding though Coffee Bay to the Ocean View Hotel and the finish. Our little slip up had cost us close on twenty minutes. With bikes washed and legs soaked in icy pool water, quite a few beers were had at the finish overlooking the bay before everyone moved to the Coffee Bay Hotel for supper and an evening of fines by “Spider Clarke”. Thousand of rands (R195 000 I think) were collected that evening in the name of promoting education in the former Transkei by building classrooms.

#### **Day 4: Ocean View to Umgazi River Bungalows**

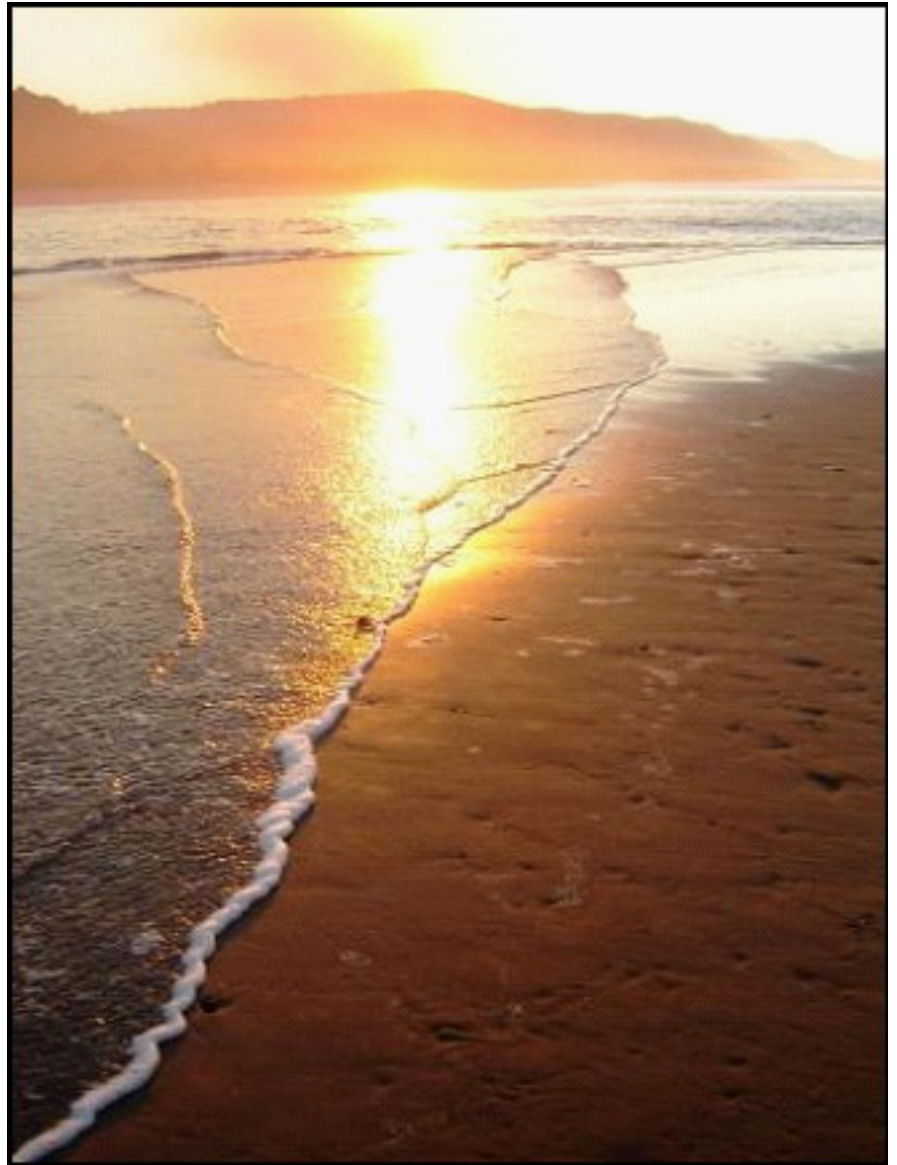
- o 63km
- o 5 hours 3 minutes
- o 1625 meters ascent

Day 4 of the race is the longest. Thankfully so, a great deal of it is on district road and 4x4 tracks. Stu and I decided to take the safe option and follow teams who have done the race before and thus know the route. Our navigational aid? Paddling legend Graeme Pope-Ellis and Shaun Biggs. We stuck to these guys like glue! The race start was scheduled for 07h00 instead of the usual 08h00. Teams headed up a seriously sick uphill track before joining a district road to the Umtata mouth and hopeful ferry. On arrival, the Pope and Biggs snuck onto the only motorboat leaving us with a rowing boat! Therefore, we really had to catch up to avoid being left behind! A second ferry followed at the Mtakagagie River, which deposited us right in the mangroves. The route progressed into the Huleka Nature Reserve. The Reserve has unfortunately fallen into a poor state of repair but still offered fantastic scenery. Eventually we reached Mpande and the dreaded Stimela hill. With this overcome we raced down towards the Umngazana River and the last ferry crossing. We had numerous ferry options as every local with a boat was clambering for the business. We ended up with the most pricy one! The last section was a mad dash along 5km of beach front before a finish at Umgazi lagoon and the banging of the gong. What a relief!

The rest of the afternoon was spent on the deck considering the highlights of the race, the scenery and how heavy a bike gets after Mother No. 3. The prize giving that evening was a great affair of footage of the whole four days as well as the podium finishers, Nguze (idiot) and Samaritan of the Race.

Team McCain Adventure Addicts finished in 21st place overall out of 80 teams and thoroughly enjoyed the experience! It was certainly unlike any other mountain bike race! We would care to thank the race organisers, Steven Stamp, Glen Haw and Rebecca van der Linde and their sponsors for a brilliant race: Imana Foods, Capestorm, Chemspec, USN Umhlobo Wenene FM, San Aqua Rooibos Iced, Kal-Gard and Hydro Gear.

Thanks is due to Dave Rawlinson for use of his Rav 4 (sorry about the tyre), Dave and Anne for acting as a transfer, The Kings for the Hilton accommodation and Luke and Buckey Simmons for the lift back to Port Edward.



Finally thanks to all our sponsors, whom this would not be possible without:

- **McCain** - for supporting our active, healthy lifestyles!
- **PVM NUTRITIONAL PRODUCTS** – for the energy products necessary to keep us going!
- **SALOMON** - for the footwear
- **GIANT BICYCLES** – for the Anthem mountain bikes
- **ISLAND TRIBE** – For sun protection