



## Singletrack Mania 2007 – 220km Adventure Race

*(McCain Adventure Addicts: Graham “Tweet” Bird, Jeanette “Bubbles” Walder, Tatum “Hobbit” Prins and James “TBC” Lea-Cox    Seconding specialists: Angela Segal, Nicole Walder and Katharine Hill)*

[Click here](#) to view all the photos



To a mountain biker, the term Singletrack generally refers to sweet, narrow trails that wind down a mountain side generating white knuckles and a huge smile. To an adventure racer... well it means pretty much the same. However, when Fred Richardson uses it in the title of a 220km adventure race along the Wild Coast, it elicits goose bumps, incredible anticipation and some may even include a little apprehension.

The Singletrack Mania as hosted by Singletrack Africa was different from the very beginning. There was no registration to rush to, briefing to sit through, maps to plot until all hours before the race or any checkpoints to "clip". Teams were posted the maps before the race and emailed the coordinates of the checkpoints and transitions. This allowed the navigators in each team to leisurely plot the route, make full use of Google Earth and finalize team strategy without a looming race start affecting ones concentration. And the race briefing? Online over Windows Messenger. Quick and easy.

The race was scheduled to start at Cremorne Estates in Port St Johns at 05h30 on Saturday morning. Problem is it's still a 12 odd hour drive to get there from the mine dumps. The McCain Adventure Addicts had a bit of a logistical nightmare just to get to the race. It went some thing like this: "TBC" arrived at Tweet's house on Thursday night together with Katharine. Sleep. Wake up and pack. Discover Tweet's cranks are loose. Rush to bike shop to replace a BB at R400. Find space for Nicole's minimal kit in the trailer. Drive to the airport to pick up our friendly Hobbit who somehow enjoys the weather in Cape Town. All race down to Pietermaritzburg to pick up Bubbles from another airport 'cos she could not get the day off and collect Angela from the tallest building in the sleepy hollow. Finally

with a team of seven reunited and fed, brave the road to Port St John's via Ixopo and Kokstad. The McCain Addicts arrived at the start at the reasonable hour of 21h00 and quickly sorted out the final pieces of kit before bunking down under the team gazebo.

The race was to start with a short paddle down river towards the sea. 8 official teams and 4 pairs gathered along the river bank for team photographs before climbing into their K2's for the gun. In typical Fred style the race was started exactly on time and if you were not ready you just had to catch up. Team Cannonball Fly, with two seasoned duzi paddlers in their midst, quickly took the lead followed closely by the McCain Addicts. As a proud non-paddler I was not used to my arms moving so fast and I was quite happy when the 3kms ended at the river mouth.



McCain had a quick transition to their mountain bikes but were followed closely by the Adventure Inc Red Ants and Cannonball Fly as the team headed through Port St Johns to Silaka Nature Reserve. McCain quickly pulled into the lead and reached the entrance gate first. This was to be the first checkpoint. In this race there were to be no checkpoint flags or clips. Rather each team had to carry a digital camera and take a photograph of the team at the feature that represented the checkpoint. In this case, the Silaka gate.

From CP1, the three lead teams headed through the nature reserve up onto a steep jeep track on to the plateau. The jeep track quickly became a district road before

intersecting the main Umngazi River Bungalows access road. CP 2 was to be at the Umngazi Gate where the teams bumped into George the Medic and Fred's partner in crime, Tezz Olds. The route progressed inland from this point and the Red Ants and McCain pushed ahead of Cannonball Fly. Once on the local district roads, McCain and the Ants took a short cut down a valley on some tricky single track. The "sneak" involved a bit of hike-a-bike but ultimately cut out a few kilometers before the river put-in.

McCain had a quick transition before running and then dragging their boats down to the river to start the paddle in first position. The 35 km paddle started well with some entertaining rapids but shortly the sand banks began. Luckily the Tweets and Bubbles of this world can read a river really well so this did not really pose a problem. McCain came off the water at Cremorne in a little over 4 hours.

Leg 4 was a short mountain bike section along the coast to Poenskop and an assisted transition. McCain blitzed along the road, hardly slowing up the steep concreted inclines, so to try and drag out a bigger lead on the chasing teams. The McCain seconding crew pulled out all stops in ensuring that the team were well fed and watered before sending them on a 21 km hike to Mbotyi.

McCain headed along the beach at a quick trot before latching onto a hiking trail on the cliffed-out sections. The leg was basically a mixture of soft beach hiking at high tide and heading inland on hiking trails and cattle tracks to take short cuts behind the headlands. The team passed along some spectacular and isolated parts of the wild coast, and came across the odd rundown holiday house and groupings of smiling local children. McCain finished the hike at Mbotyi campsite in 4.5 hours to an unassisted transition to their mountain bikes.



Luckily the seconds had left some food and water in place at Mbotyi so McCain were able to refuel before a monster climb up never-ending concrete strips to Magwa Falls. By this time darkness had fallen and the team left transition with bike lights blazing. When Tweet was asked what lay ahead, the answer involved a few very descriptive words about contours that were damn close together. McCain made quick work of the first section of the leg and slipped onto a shortcut through a forestry area before arriving at the renowned Magwa tea plantations. From there the route progressed through an avenue of 100 year old trees before arriving to a warm meal and an impending abseil. On arrival, McCain were met by Fred and Mike Baker. Now for those of you who don't know who Mike is, do a Google search for the Morgan's Run 400km race. You will find a man who is incredibly passionate about the Transkei.



McCain transitioned for 20 minutes or so as they stuffed themselves with pasta and fitted climbing harnesses. What lay before the team was a 145 meter abseil into the Magwa Falls kloof to face the feared serpent that is believed to dwell in its depths. Bubbles and I headed over the edge first and begun the overly long journey to the bottom in pitch black darkness. Tweet and the Hobbit followed shortly thereafter. The base of the kloof was a sodden maze of massive boulders and waterfalls. Anything and everything you stood on was slippery to the point that going on all fours was the safest bet. McCain had been informed of an escape route a short way down the main



kloof but despite an hour and a half of bundu bashing and probing into the shear walls, the decision was made to proceed down and out of

the kloof proper and thereafter follow local trails to Mbotyi. After much slipping, sliding and a few bruised body parts, McCain emerged out of the “Gates” of the kloof and accidentally discovered a highway of a path. The navigation on this section of the course was in-depth and technical. And sleep monsters were looming so much so that a 6 minute power nap was in order. Tweet, however, kept his wits about him and his eyes glued to the map and shortly the team was traipsing into the Mbotyi campsite to source some drinking water. 14 kms of hiking remained before the next transition. McCain headed to the beach and upped their pace after sighting a team in the distance. At this point in the race, McCain assumed that the chasing teams had found the escape route and pulled into the lead. This fueled the team even more and within a half hour USN had been sucked in. McCain quickly took the lead but were not sure where the Red Ants or Cannonball Fly were. Were they in the lead or still struggling in the kloof? After 10 kms, the team reached Waterfall Bluff, which served as CP3 and another photo opportunity. The team had yet to see any typical AR footprints at this point and desperately hoping that their lead was still safe. A short 4 km’s had McCain traipsing into transition to cheers (okay so they were our seconds) and the lead was confirmed. The seconds laid on a fantastic hot steaming meal straight from Woolies!



With only three legs and 65 km left, McCain raced out of transition on their mountain bikes. The route initially headed along the coast before heading inland via district roads till CP 4 located at Horseshoe Falls. Thereafter, a short down hill was followed to an unassisted transition. Unassisted it was as even the marshal was not there. McCain pondered the possibilities of having their bikes nicked by a wannabe mountain biker, but all agreed that this is the reason there is bike insurance. The team quickly stashed their bikes and headed out on the final 30 km hiking leg.

The team alternated between walking along the beach and heading inland where possible. In most cases there were a few jeep tracks and cattle tracks. Along the trail the team was required to swim across rivers and bundu bashed through coastal forest to gain the beach when the trail faded. The sand and the constant “getting wet” started to play havoc with my feet. I was developing blisters where I have never had blisters before! The rest of the team was clever enough to pack gaiters so escaped most of the discomfort. As the sun was setting, McCain reached the final river at the boat pick-up. The rain also started and damn was it cold! McCain struggled to find their boats for a while but found them behind one of the USN seconding vehicles... sabotage? Mmm. The team quickly ran their boats down to the



river for the final 2.5 km paddle to the finish line at the Old Pont.

The McCain Adventure Addicts crossed the finish line in first place at 18h54 on Sunday night in a race time of 37 hours and 24 minutes. Team Kinetic USN followed an hour later and the Red Ants a further 2 hours back. All in all 6 teams finished the race with Team Pure Adventure Race paddling in a 08h05 on Monday morning.

The McCain Adventure Addicts would care to thank their fantastic seconding crew for providing immense support in keeping the team running on

all six pistons; to Fred and

Tezz for staging a fantastic race, which put the adventure back in adventure racing and took the racers to places one would never venture; to George the Medic for ensuring medical backup on the course; Roger, Phineas and Mike Baker for the fantastic rope section; and to all the sponsors and marshals who made this race happen.

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!