



## The Wartrail Tri Challenge 2007

Written by James Lea-Cox

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

“The Wartrail” is an extreme ultra-eco three day stage marathon up, over and through the mountains of the Eastern Cape that usually takes place every March. This year, however, the powers that be decided that mid-winter would be a really “good” time to stage a 60km mountain run, a 135km mountain bike followed by a final 70 km paddle down the really low Orange River.



The race starts in the town of Lady Grey, which lies at the base of the Witteberg Mountains. Racers are to traverse the ridge line along the old Transki/South Africa border before descending to Balloch for the night. Day 2 takes those still standing up Lundeans Nek by bike, through to Sterkspruit, Herschel and on to the Orange River. On day 3 you get to sit a little more while paddling down the Orange River to Aliwal North.

A freak cold front had turned the mountains white during the week preceding the event, but sunny clear

skies were predicted for most of the weekend. Another cold front was, however, predicted for Sunday afternoon. Racers had gathered in and around Lady Grey for a race briefing at the Country Club on Friday before melting away to various abodes for an early morning start.

Alarm clocks buzzed, Pronutro disappeared and finally with great trepidation of what was to follow, the McCain Adventure Addicts gathered at the start line on Saturday morning wrapped up in thermal leggings, quite a few base layers and cosy outer shells. The race director, Adrian Saffy, gave us the go at 0430 and, as per usual, a mad dash down the main (?) road in Lady Grey ensued.



The super athletes in the form of Martin Dreyer, Jeannie Bomford, Nicolas Mulder and McCain's Kobus van Zyl quickly took the lead up to CP1 located at the Tower. Racers were to collect 5 checkpoints along the ridge line each supported by a willing bunch of marshals with the odd supply of Old Brown Sherry. The cold front had dumped snow sporadically over the mountains which slowed many of the racers down. The white stuff tended to suck at ones feet. As such, overall the times were slower compared to previous years. The McCain Adventure addicts pressed on over unforgiving terrain, making small navigation choices of whether to skirt peaks or climb the buggers. The decision was made early on to stick to the northern slopes that generally had less snow cover. This theory did not always work as at one stage we ended up bundu bashing through a snow choked thicket. Finally, in the late afternoon, the last CP was reached with a promise that the finish was just down the valley. Well, it was not just down the valley but after negotiating numerous cattle tracks, which turned out to be the best paths of the course, and a jeep track, Bubbles and I crossed the finish line at Balloch in just over 14 hours to a chocolate cup cake. Kobus had finished quite a while earlier in an impressive 3rd place. He claimed he wanted to see if he was still fit enough?! We were followed shortly thereafter by Alex, Stu, Pies and Cindi. The rest of the evening was whiled away tucking into a fantastic farmer's style dinner under a sandstone overhang before the cycle on Sunday.



Sunday morning dawned nice and crisp and with a definite chill in the air. At 0700 the race was started with a short ride down the Balloch driveway and on to the first climb of the day. I tried desperately to keep up with Nicolas but resided by myself to some solo riding. The route progresses over Lundean's Nek, which is not as bad as it may seem, before an exhilarating descent down to Telle Junction in the valley below. Speeds were in excess of 70km an hour and one could not help but consider the implications of misjudging the hairpin



bends. There were various CPs along the ride where Graham Bird did an excellent

seconding job in providing sandwiches and liquid refreshments before rushing off to the next CP. Most of the ride is on district roads, so the km's tend to fly by. However, the cold front was hitting the mountains and along with it came an unpleasant headwind, which reduced one to 12 km/h on the flats... and 30km on the up hills when the road turned! After 6 hours 40 minutes I crossed the finish line behind Martin, Jeanie, Andre and Nicolas. Vicky came in shortly thereafter followed by the McCain bunch of Bubbles, Stu, Pies and Alex.

Unfortunately, most of the McCain crew were subject to a weekly chore called work and thus could not participate in the Paddle on the Monday. Vicky, Alex and Cindi were, however, in attendance to keep the Addiction in the race while the rest of us sat back in heated offices up north. As it turns out the paddle was shortened to 30km instead of the usual 70. Something along the lines of a lack of water or maybe the extreme cold! In the end the McCain ladies team of Cindi (hike), Jeanette (bike) and Vicky (paddle) won the ladies team event.

A big thank you goes to Adrian Saffy, his crew and his sponsors (Salomon, Senqu Municipality and Netcare 911) for staging a fantastic event. We really do appreciate all your efforts especially the marshals at every CP who despite the cold always put on a welcoming smile. A final thank you goes to Graham Bird who acted as team second due to a niggling injury. I'm quite sure he was not amused!



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

McCain – for keeping the adventurous spirit alive.

PVM Products – for keeping us going.

Giant Bicycles – for pure riding pleasure.

Salomon – for the excellent footwear.

Island Tribe – for prevent sun and snow burn.

Addicts:

Jeannette Walder (Bubbles)

Stu Rawlinson

Kobus van Zyl

Cindy van Zyl

James Lea-Cox

Alice Rawlinson (Pies)

Alex Wagner

Vicky Wagner