



Runners on the Storm

Doing the **Impossible** Race 19-24 September 2009

photos jacques marais and kelvin trautman

Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric.
-Bertrand Russell, philosopher, mathematician, author, Nobel laureate (1872-1970)

Doing the impossible

THE INAUGURAL HI-TEC OTTER AFRICAN TRAIL RUN WAS A RACE OF NEVERS.

Never before had a sporting event been granted passage through the mind-bogglingly pristine and precious Tsitsikamma National Park. When that became a reality through the foresight of Park management (Senior Section Ranger Owen Govender and Park Manager Darren Claassen), it was wagered



that the first person would never run the rugged 42km in under five hours.

After the last of 167 finishers from 200 starters had run or crawled over the floating bridge at Nature's Valley, it was clear that both nevers had become realities.

"A new benchmark has been set in South African trail running", said Mickey Mallet, MD of outdoor shoe producer Hi-Tec South Africa. "We expect this event to grow immensely, not only amongst local racers, but also within the wider international running community. In my opinion, this is not only the most technical trail run in SA, but also the most beautiful!"

That reputation had attracted arguably the

greatest trail running field ever assembled on South African soil. They gathered in the murkiness of first light with an electric atmosphere buzzing in the cool morning air. Barring Ryan Sandes, who was on his way to the Amazon, the country's premier trail and adventure racing heavyweights were there: Bruce Arnett, Dion Middelkoop, Leo Rust, John Collins, Rohan Kennedy, Dominic Wills, Cas van Aardenne, Donovan Sims, Graham Bird and Richard Kolbe. David Labuschagne flew the flag for mountain biking's challengers.



In my youth I participated in around 100 marathons and ultras. This is the best event I have ever entered. The organisation, the terrain, the marshals, everything, and I mean everything, was just superb! The ambience of the Otter terrain is a highlight. Second is the toughness of running across the pallets at the end of the event. Kevin Lancaster

Also in the field was Comrades '91 winner Nick Bester, who had an eye on staying on for another four days to challenge for the Southern Storm Duathlon's top five. That event followed the Otter and would test the abilities of competitors in 12 stages: eight of which were runs.

Less high-profile than all the above was a late-30s guy who'd run a 2:26 London Marathon in '97. That guy was Derrick Baard, freshly recovered from a 2,300km Freedom Challenge stint on his MTB. Interestingly, his running would prove more reliable than his biking.

In the women's race, Su Don-Wauchope had

shown the best hand at the Prologue, but the Scott sisters from Pietermaritzburg, Kirsty and Sarah, could not be ignored as podium princesses keen for the Otter crown.

A seeding prologue had been conducted the day before, in which pint-sized Drakensberg resident Iain Don-Wauchope had shown that he was in fact a giant amongst the trees of the field. His time was over two minutes faster than next finisher David Labuschagne - over a 3.8km course! To prevent start congestion at the start, seeded groups of four runners would be released at 15 second intervals.

History is made

The blast of the hooter released the first wave onto a short tar section, the last they would encounter for 42km. They'd also only see their first jeeptrack just 1.5km from the end. Rugged and sometimes downright vicious terrain lay ahead of them. The hundreds and hundreds of wooden soil-retention stairs - which burned muscles on the way up and assaulted knees on the way down - were probably the kindest because even novices got the hang of them eventually. Less easy to master were the jagged sea-front rocks and rounded estuarine boulders. They were entirely less forgiving. Newbies lost nearly all their time here as they crawled, slipped, slid and fell their way across their inhospitable surfaces. This did not prevent at least one guy from running - and finishing - in Vibram Five Fingers. He'll probably climb Everest in Stokies next. That's the Spirit of the Otter.

What happened after the start?

Su Don-Wauchope took off with a pack of male trail hotshots, but left even Leo Rust, Dion Middelkoop and X in her wake as she tore down the tar road like it was a 5km short course. She was simply in a class of her own against her female rivals and revelled in the singletrack despite her road running background. "I will definitely be back to run the Otter - it was the most challenging and scenic run I have ever had the privilege to compete in. I think the times will definitely get faster as we now know what to expect and how better to prepare! The next barrier in the women's race has to be sub 5:30..."

I took quite a bit of time to make sure I ate well and stayed hydrated. I ran for a bit near the beginning with Graham Bird, who is an experienced adventure racer. He was taking the time to walk even moderate uphill sections at the start of the race, in the interest of finishing the Otter strong, as well as having something left for the rest of the Southern Storm."

Her husband Iain Don-Wauchope had a more tactical race on his hands. "From the gun, Rohan (Kennedy) took off like a rabbit. I was happy to let him go and stick with John Collins, the guy with the experience and local knowledge. John set the pace and I stuck on his heels with Dawid right behind me. We caught Rohan on the first technical rock-hopping section and John took the lead. At the first hut, about 5km into the race, John darted off to throw his muffin wrapper into the bin. I was now in the lead and continued up the hill from the huts. At the top of the hill I noticed the guys had strung out a bit with only Rohan close behind. I didn't want to stop and waste time, so I continued at the same pace. Shortly thereafter it was just Rohan and I. We exchanged the lead a number of times but didn't put in any intervals or unnecessary surges. Dawid caught up to us while we were walking up a long, steep ascent. We continued together until just before the half-way munchie point where Dawid dropped off again at another technical section.

We reached half-way in 2:20 and I suspected we had gone out too hard. But Rohan took off like a rabbit again after our short food stop and it took me a few kays to catch up! My legs were starting to get weary and I knew it was going to be a long pull to the finish. In the back of my mind I always thought John would show up somewhere and a few kilometres after crossing the Bloukrantz river, we could see him closing in behind us. We were now about 10km from the finish and I knew that if we kept the same pace up, he would quickly catch us. So I stepped it up and thought to myself that if John wanted to get into the lead, he'd really have to work for it!

Rohan tried to stay with me as I increased the pace but he dropped off after a nasty climb from the last hut. I kept glancing back, only to see John getting closer and closer. It felt like he was yapping at my heels! Fortunately, the trail got easier as it skirted the tops of the cliffs approaching Nature's Valley and I could lengthen my stride and open up a little. If there had been sharp climbs or technical rocky sections, John may have caught me.

Coming onto the last beach, I thought I was at the finish, but there was still 2.5km to go! I was struggling at this stage and was worried John was going to suddenly storm past me. A small incline reared its head in front of me and I had to walk. *Don't look back, don't look back.* At the top, I looked back. No John. *Phew. Keep going.* The final hurdle was crossing the floating walkway made from wooden pallets. My body was knackered and it was like running through sinking sand. Then my foot got stuck between two slats and I fell down. The only way forward was to crawl and pull myself along the pallets until I reached the shore and solid ground. A short stumble to the finish line and it was all over."

Next page... Southern Storm

Otter Trail facts

- Opened in 1988
- The most popular hiking trail in South Africa
- Ranked by many as one of the best trails in the world
- Currently booked a year in advance. Only 12 people per day are permitted to start the trail.
- It follows the coastline from Storms River Mouth to Nature's Valley in the Tsitsikamma National Park, in the Garden Route of the Eastern Cape
- It takes five days to hike (missing overnight stops is not allowed)
- The shoreline terrain is rugged and rocky, while the mostly forested interior ranges in elevation from sea level to a height of more than 150m
- Most of the trail follows cliff tops returning to sea level to cross rivers
- The Otter Run involves no fewer than 11 significant climbs (with more than 50m of elevation gain) with three climbs exceeding 100m and a total elevation gain of over 2,100m. Some of these climbs are steep enough to force even the strongest runners to walk and in many places it is stepped



A hard-earned sight from the cliff-tops with less than 10km to go. For those with the time to stop and savour it all, a small pod of whales were clearly visible in the sheltered waters below.

Want to run the Otter African Trail Run in 2010?



- Run lots of stairs (up and down) in your training
- Find a river bed or rocky shoreline to train your rock-hopping skills
- Incorporate some strength training in your programme
- Emphasise shorter high intensity runs during the week
- Train with someone who did the event this year

The 2010 Otter African Trail Run is pending approval from SANPARKS

HI-TEC OTTER AFRICAN TRAIL RUN LEADERS

RANK	Name	Time	Race
Male OPEN			
1	Iain Don-Wauchope	04:59:02	SS
2	John Collins	05:01:38	OTTER
3	Rohan Kennedy	05:12:20	OTTER
4	Bruce Arnett	05:12:42	OTTER
5	Dominic Wills	05:20:55	SS
6	David Labuschagne	05:24:59	SS
7	Ryan Hodieme	05:27:12	SS
8	Cas van Aardenne	05:33:54	SS
9	Donovan Sims	05:48:28	SS
10	Ross Macgregor	05:50:50	OTTER
Female OPEN			
1	Su Don-Wauchope	05:58:07	SS
2	Sarah Scott	06:25:59	SS
3	Kirsty Scott	06:27:09	SS
4	Hanlie Booyens	06:49:47	SS
5	Rika Kolbe	07:06:10	OTTER
6	Janine King	07:19:31	OTTER
7	Regine Enenkel	07:27:23	OTTER
8	Christine Woods	07:47:01	SS
9	Elfrieda Pretorius	08:55:35	SS
10	Lauren Goulding	08:57:57	SS
Female VET			
1	Jacoline Haasbroek	06:09:24	OTTER
2	Rhona Zonnestein	06:36:09	SS
3	Monica Botha	07:55:05	SS
4	Tessa Van Schaik	08:04:15	OTTER
5	Helke Jakins	08:05:19	SS
Male VET			
1	Nick Bester	05:33:04	SS
2	Iain Morshhead	05:43:13	OTTER
3	Nico Schoeman	05:59:37	OTTER
4	Filippo Faralla	06:09:56	OTTER
5	Angelo Henry	06:36:27	OTTER

You can't be an otter without water

and you can't do the Otter Trail without getting your feet wet: Tsitsikamma means Place of Much Water. There are eight major stream crossings on the Otter Trail, the main one being Bloukrans, which should be crossed at low tide. The Cape Clawless Otter, which gives the trail its name, is one of 13 species of otter in the world, two of which are clawless.



Leo Rust is über-pleased to be able to wade across Bloukrans on his way to 14th place



Nick Bester had a brilliant race and provided the best photograph of a floating bridge dunking

Fifth-placed Dominic Wills reaches the end of the road, so to speak and proves that it's better to run on water than walk, if given the option



Classic Prologue moments included dicing with sharp rocks and big swells at Nature's Valley



It's impossible to not feel your spirit soar at the sight of Nature's Valley



Filling up with fynbos-tinged stream water, just like in the good old days



Iain Don-Wauchope raced in Hi-Tec's Trail Eruption and Rapid Aero shoes



Riding the rusty disused bridge incurred a 30 minute penalty. Everyone pushed...



If you go down to the woods today, look down or you're in for a big surprise!



Hanlie Booysens was one of several riders with tech issues on day four



"This was a different race - we adventure racers are used to racing non-stop for days. This was: wake up, race balls to the wall, eat, sleep, wake up and race hard again." Donovan Sims, East London



Pieter de Bruyn shows off a biking memento at the end of Day 4



Rock-hopping was the order of the day during the Otter and Robberg



Bikes were transported between transitions in competitors' bike boxes



A forest giant chased the terrified helicopter crew on day four



Otter entrants left footprints but many could not resist taking photographs



Roadie tactics on day four with Nick Bester and Graham Daniel causing pain and suffering to those. Iain Don-Wauchope in yellow leads the chase

Sand, sweat and gears

The inaugural SOUTHERN STORM, presented by Hi-Tec, will be remembered for two things.

The first is that it took place almost exclusively in the fragile ecosystems of SANparks, Cape Nature and MTO Forestry-protected areas. Allowing an activity like The Otter African Trail Run, the first stage of Southern Storm, was a first for Tsitsikamma National Park. The Southern Storm Duathlon on MTO land required stringent environmental considerations, including bio-friendly bike washing.

The second is the fine style that the event was won by the husband and wife team of IAIN and SU DON-WAUCHOPE and the praise finishers gave the event.

Iain (Hi-Tec/Mountain Splendour) held off concerted pressure from DAVID LABUSCHAGNE (Toyota Supercycling) to win by a narrow margin of less than 10 minutes. Considering that David had a bad day and lost 25 minutes to Iain on The Otter, his comeback on the bike is nothing short of remarkable.

Iain's wife Su enjoyed a larger buffer in the open women's category, with over an hour separating her from HANLIE BOOYENS (Jeep Apparel), but anything was possible. Both Su and Hanlie suffered punctures and mechanical problems on several days, especially day four. Su capitalised on her exceptional running prowess, which saw her finishing with the top 10 men on several occasions, while Hanlie's technical woes dulled her legendary riding strength to a degree.

The Don-Wauchope's achievement would still be admirable if it wasn't for the fact that they had with their 2-year-old daughter Abigaël after a last-minute change of baby-sitting plans. They camped with her, kept her happy and went off to battle every day while she spent time in the care of good Samaritans including the ever-accommodating Nomad Adventures crew.

South African endurance and Comrades legend NICK BESTER (Hi-Tec) dominated the veteran race. The Pretorian ran and rode with equal brilliance, despite a swollen ankle courtesy of the Otter. Port Elizabeth's PAUL WOLFF, better known for his Ironman abilities, was a strong finisher on several stages, especially the running legs on the final day. A wrong turn at the Otter cost him valuable time and he'd lost his timing dibber while negotiating rough terrain.

Knysna dietician RHONA ZONNESTEIN's victory in the veteran women's category from Monica Botha and Heike Jakins seemed too easy with her nearly two hour buffer but the truth was far from it. She'd fractured her ninth rib riding a new bike over slippery roots just 10 days before the Otter Run. She needed strapping to do any activity and stopped training until race day. "Maybe that is why my quads totally cramped at the Prologue. You can imagine my stress levels for the next day!"

Second-placed MONICA BOTHA, from Dundee, KZN, was in a similar situation, but with a more recent injury. She nursed a painful shoulder after tearing ligaments during the Otter. Definitely not a race for sissies!

Race website www.southernstorm.co.za
 Title sponsor www.hi-tec.co.za
 MTO Forestry (Mountain to Ocean) www.mtoecotourism.co.za
 Cape Nature's 24 reserves inc Robberg www.capenature.org.za
 SANParks reserves inc Tsitsikamma & Knysna www.sanparks.org

EVENT SPONSORS: Hi-Tec, Municipality of the Eden District, Knysna and Plettenberg Bay, Helly Hansen, Hunters, Land Rover, GU, Nomad Adventures, Squirt, African Organics, Island Tribe, Bike Box Company, Earth Scout, Super Rent, Go Multi magazine, AC Environmental, Bio Bin, PG Bison and Kurland

"Our intention is not to make the Southern Storm the toughest event. Our goal is to create a memorable event." Mark Collins



Pieter de Bruyn negotiates a forest section

They said: Results of Go Multi survey (103 respondents)

65%	Had not hiked the Otter Trail before
63%	Otter African Trail Run tougher than expected
40%	Bloukrans was the best part of the Otter
82%	Intend to do the Otter again next year
52%	Otter African Trail Run the best event I have ever done
Day 4	(Finish at Portland Manor) tied with Otter for favourite stage

SOUTHERN STORM LEADERBOARD

RANK	Name	Time
Male OPEN		
1	Iain Don-Wauchope	19:05:37
2	David Labuschagne	19:25:25
3	Cas van Aardenne	19:51:41
4	Ryan Hodierne	20:14:31
5	Dominic Wills	20:47:30
6	Graham Daniel	21:25:00
7	Donovan Sims	21:25:46
8	Derrick Baard	21:51:47
9	Hendri du Plessis	22:05:28
10	Pierre Conradie	22:15:19
Female OPEN		
1	Su Don-Wauchope	22:11:55
2	Hanlie Booysens	23:25:16
3	Kirsty Scott	25:52:20
4	Sarah Scott	26:11:15
5	Christine Woods	26:26:17
6	Ina van Tonder	32:25:53
7	Lauren Goulding	32:30:42
8	Janine Wencke	32:40:52
9	Elfrieda Pretorius	33:26:44
10	Petro Labuschagne	33:57:14
Female VET		
1	Rhona Zonnestein	25:09:09
2	Monica Botha	26:58:40
3	Heike Jakins	27:46:55
4	Tania de Muelenaere	31:14:26
5	Angi Stanford	31:42:10
Male VET		
1	Nick Bester	20:19:47
2	Paul Wolff	21:43:48
3	Adrian Booysen	23:13:16
4	Noel Ernstzen	23:39:13
5	Danie du Toit	23:56:30

Photo Jacques Mareels



I of the Storm

Every single person at The Hi-Tec Otter - and the Southern Storm Duathlon, which immediately followed it - was a character, but there were some special friendships getting them through without the proverbial Me, Myself, I



John Brimble concrete industry
Joe Tyrrell cardiologist

Capetonian running icon JOHN BRIMBLE (62) finished his 30th Two Oceans Marathon this year, from 32 starts. "I now just hang in to finish under six hours... oh the ignominy!" jests John, who ran the famous ultra in 3 hours 26 minutes in his heyday.

"The trail runs have added a whole new dimension to running. When we started road running we were considered weird. When we started trail runs such as Swellendam, Outeniqua, Boland we were thought of as misfits... And now? We are all mainstream. Strange world, indeed!"

JOE TYRRELL (62) returned from Morocco with his mate John Brimble two weeks before the Otter. "While there, we thought we would take a day or two off to climb Jebel Toubkal, which is not very high (4,167m) but nevertheless the highest mountain in Northern Africa. The Otter was technically more difficult than anything on Toubkal!"

As you can gather from his 30 Two Oceans runs, John is a glutton for punishment and is a bad influence on his mates, getting them to do all kinds of things which sane people would not normally do.

I've known John for a good few years and we have been climbing and running together since 2001 when we went to Pakistan together to climb (unsuccessfully) a mountain called Spantik (7,020m). We happened to be there, in northern Pakistan, on 9/11, which made for a very interesting trip. Since then we've climbed together in Bolivia, Namibia (Spitzkop) and Tibet, and also run many races and trails together, including the Cape Odyssey a year ago and now the Otter."

Werner Jonkers
bungy jump operator
David Bruiners
field ranger



WERNER 'Trail Dog' JONKERS is not your typical endurance athlete. "I was always a power athlete or in extreme sports. The weirdest thing to me was changing from being a downhill mountain biker and a rugby player since school. Quite a change in mindset. Now I'm back home in Storms River, nursing my aches and pains: two aching knees (Werner was riding an undersized mountain bike - Ed) and a lost toe nail. That's the Southern Storm to me, but the pain is worth it. It's my second major race. First was the Bull of Africa, a 570km adventure race. What keeps me going is being myself and being blissful - that's me - no matter what pain I'm in."

The ever-chirpy Werner works as a bungy supervisor at the Bloukrans Face Adrenalin jumpsite, where he no doubt calms jangled nerves with his upbeat attitude. Face Adrenalin also sponsored his race entry.



Shaen Adey photographer
Fiona McIntosh magazine editor, author

SHAEN ADEY sprained her ankle badly 8km into the Otter run. But she had best mate Fiona to coax her along to the finish. "I know Fi gave up her potential podium position to make sure I crossed the finish line after I. She's a four-time Olympian, so believe me she's strong. That was probably her personal vendetta against the medic who told me 'there will be no tomorrow for you' as I lay leg-up after day one. My answer: 'I've got news for you.' He scowled everyday for the rest of the event (but still took care of me). My inner challenge was to get a smile out of him by the end... I did. On the last day I asked Fiona if we could stop and check my bike's brakes. They felt jammed. They weren't; and that's when I realised with horror that my brake was on - I'd hit a wall and Fiona's strength literally pulled me across the finish line. We completed all stages of Southern Storm together: the ideal way to spend time with my best friend."

FIONA MCINTOSH is a four-time Olympian for Britain from 1984 to 1996. She was a fencing finalist in Barcelona 1992, the Commonwealth champion in 1990, and won 12 Commonwealth medals.

"I love challenges, and Southern Storm seemed a big challenge. And the opportunity to run the Otter trail was too good to miss. I also liked the fact that it was the inaugural event - always exciting - and a chance to really get out into the wilderness and otherwise rarely accessible parts of the new Garden Route National Park. I think journeying on foot or bike really opens up areas in a new way - it's much more intimate than just driving through. And I love big events - the camaraderie, the camps, the hype. I don't normally do events twice - life is too short, and there is so much new stuff every year. But I have to say I'd be tempted!"

Fiona and Shaen met in Mauritius in 2003 to work on a commissioned book about the island (Seven Days in Mauritius, Struik). "Shaen had done numerous books but it was my first, so I assumed that we'd work together. She didn't share that view - she'd never even met most of the other authors she'd worked with. She went out to Mauritius a month ahead of me, and was most uncommunicative. I have to admit that I had assumed she would set up everything and I could then sort of jump on the bandwagon. So I arrived, moved into her room, jumped on the back of her scooter and despite her absolute horror at this invasion, we became mates and great working partners."

They've done many hikes and climbs together, including the Cederberg Traverse, and ice climbing in the Drakensberg, and have produced three books on hiking trails.

27&28 December 2009
Plettenbergbay

6 KM OCEAN SWIM or
RUN 10 KM or
3 KM BEACH WALK
or OCEAN PADDLE 15 KM or
1 MILE LAGOON SWIM
or 25 KM MTB or
SABRINA KIDS OF STEEL
100m swim & 1km run

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