



Expedition Africa enthralls Kouga

By Bev Mortimer

Expedition Africa 2017 and its intrepid explorers took St Francis and Kouga by storm with most of the residents and businesses except, dot-watching online or reading up exploits of the 39 teams over seven days.

Coffee bars, social soirees, lunches and dinners in the villages and towns of Kouga, particularly in St Francis Bay and Cape St Francis, were abuzz with talk of the race - the most exciting and longest adventure race ever to have been held in Kouga!

Expedition Africa is part of the Adventure Racing World Series, where each international qualifier event in the Series sets a unique course to test mixed teams of four for up to 10 days of non-stop adventure racing.

It was thanks to the Malherbe family, the Cape St Francis Resort team that hosted the event, plus race organiser Kinetic Events, plus Kouga tourism teams that assisted where they could and facilitated the route and all the generous sponsors that this incredible race took place on our shores with such aplomb!

Skylootec, the Swedish team, was the winner of Expedition Africa, having crossed the finish line at Cape St Francis Resort in the Eastern Cape in just more than 80 hours. The Swedes looking fit and tired completed 514 kms and throughout the race proved their world class ability - flying through each transition, aka pit stop, efficiently, professionally and navigated each control point brilliantly. They were ecstatic to have won!

Skylootec Adventure and Thunderbolt AR teams were neck-and-neck on the third day of this seven day race. But then Thunderbolt AR had navigational difficulties during the 123 km cycle leg and dropped into 2nd place, leaving Skylootec alone, in 1st position on its last day. Not far behind were Nearest Jabsberwock and East Wind.

Skylootec Adventure will now represent Sweden at the Adventure Racing Word Champs in Wyoming at the Cowboy Tough in August. Skylootec's prize for winning Expedition Africa 2017 is an entry into the Adventure Racing World Champs.

There were several overseas teams - from as far away as Japan, Australia, Argentina - plus South African teams in the race from 12-21 May and the route was kept secret until the night before the welcome parade.

This highly competitive and exciting adventure race saw teams of four undergo an adventure of self-discovery that taxed their skills, strength and endurance levels. It was definitely not a race for the faint-hearted or unfit. As Resort owner, Fasie Malherbe, said, "This race takes guts, skill and determination!"

Race teams, including some highly experienced international, professional and elite teams, navigated in gruelling, unknown, rough and arduous territory and not least in the Baviaans 'buffalo area'. Indeed on the second day of this race, winning team Skylootec was charged by a buffalo, one of the Big Five. Fortunately some marshals in a vehicle intercepted the buffalo and the Swedes

were able to continue the race unharmed. This buffalo encounter was a highlight, the Swedes said at the finish line.

"Seeing the buffalo up close like that in the Baviaans reserve was incredible," Malin Hjalmarsson enthused. "I wanted to see them."

Apart from the Baviaans, athletes also navigated the areas of Kouga, the Klein Karoo and Tsitsikamma, with only a map and compass. Each athlete was tracked, through Gen 3 Satelite trackers, to safeguards all the competitors. But this also led to the enjoyment of online viewers who could find where each team was at any time.

Race organisers, Stephan and Heidi Muller of Kinetic Events, were pleased this year's race included the Baviaans, a UNESCO World heritage site, and the Kouga region.

During this race all teams participated in paddling, cycling, hiking, abseiling and some rope work between checkpoints. When the two winning teams came in other teams were still out there in the bush or dunes, trekking, cycling or sleeping over the next few days.

The team members were jovial, full of bravado, enthusiasm and excitement before the start on Cape St Francis beach on Day 1. Smiles however faded and relaxed manners changed into determination and intense nervous energy soon thereafter.

Owing to the extreme competitiveness of the race, many teams, particularly the professionals, raced almost non-stop with barely any sleep. This led to extreme tiredness and mistakes, resulting in some teams either missing a checkpoint, getting lost, not obeying instructions, taking the wrong bag with them, having no dry clothes or worse, taking the wrong turn and wasting an hour or more of precious lead time to rectify mistakes. The two leading teams each received an hour penalty for not following instructions and taking another route.

A few team members' troubles involved a nasty cough or two, sore, blistered feet and legs infested with thorns from cycling through thorny terrain. But at the transition points, teams relaxed and smiled again, renewing their determination to finish the race they enjoyed in spite of extremely difficult and rugged terrain in parts.

Athletes, particularly the international teams, like the Swedes, said they were overwhelmed by the beauty of the Eastern Cape and impressed with the organisation by Kinetic Events, the hospitality of the hosts, Cape St Francis Resort, and the friendliness of the enthralled locals, who cheered them on. "It is such a relief to have our first teams in," Heidi remarked at the finish line, adding it was especially great to have the event run smoothly with no major problems. "We are incredibly proud of our media team and crew for making this event come to life, featuring the most amazing imagery and footage," she said.

Heidi also thanked Cape St Francis Resort, the volunteers and everyone who helped with the race at prize giving. And for the amazed Kouga folk, it was sad when everyone packed up and left and that such an exciting and enjoyable event came to an end!



Adam Rose - Sleepmonsters.com

"I don't know of a secret plan" - Eskom Nuclear Chief

There are no secrets and corruption in the nuclear deal is unlikely, Eskom's Chief Nuclear Officer, Dave Nicholls, told delegates at the Nuclear Power Africa conference at African Utility Week last month.

Nicholls also reaffirmed Eskom's position that nuclear is not just the most viable option on the table for South Africa's future energy needs, but it is also affordable. He participated in a panel discussion on the country's nuclear positioning where he told a fully packed briefing room there has been no procurement process on nuclear.

"We are asked show us the nuclear plans you've signed with the Russians and I say I can't do that. I don't have one. I don't know of a secret plan," he said.

"I understand the process has been transparent yet there is this presumption that behind this there is something else."

In 2014 South Africa signed intergovernmental agreements with among others Russia and China as part of the multi billion rand nuclear build plans. The Western Cape High Court recently found these agreements lacked transparency prompting the government to opt for a more transparent process.

Responding to questions on corruption claims with the nuclear deal, Nicholls said corruption on the nuclear deal "could be quite challenging in the sense that it is a state to state deal. According to him concerns over corruption arise with lots of small deals and when procurement is compartmentalised.

Many have claimed the nuclear deal will be a conduit for corruption. According to Nicholls the deal will likely be Eskom contracting with overseas state organisations with a government to government loan system - something that will minimise opportunities for corruption.

Nicholls told delegates there are also claims that the uranium market is the ideal place for corruption in the nuclear deal. He said it was important to

understand uranium is not the big money spender in this deal.

He referred to the coal contracts and said it can be argued in the Eskom coal fire power stations the big money driver is the cost of coal. He said with the nuclear deal, the cost of uranium is the lesser cost driver.

"Uranium is traded like oil and the price is pretty much an international standard number. So if you ask me about that I would not go for uranium to claim corruption in the nuclear deal," he said. "My advice to the industry is that if you believe corruption will come into the nuclear deal it will not be based on the uranium supply, it would be based on something else. But it is easier to control as a single big deal than in multiple small deals."

Reaffirming nuclear as the most viable option, Nicholls dismissed other energy alternatives among which gas, hydro and solar as insufficient. Other energy and economic experts also differed on nuclear being the best option for South Africa.

Nuclear expert at the University of the Northwest, Antonie Cilliers, another panelist challenged claims of nuclear energy options as unaffordable. "A lot of people say it is expensive. The truth is nuclear does have a big capital expenditure when you build it due to all the safety aspects but once it is done, it pays for itself." He said due to paying it off over about 80 years, it "really is an investment in our children's future".

"There is a direct link between the quality of life and the availability of energy," he said.

More than 7000 decision makers for more than 80 countries attended the three day conference attended the three day conference where the latest developments, challenges and opportunities in the power and water sectors came under the spotlight.

• By Alceste October, African Utility Week