

# going the distance

you swim.

Then off to Presley Bay. It was getting late now and I was anxious as we still had to cross the Mdumbi river. We crossed it at 7.15pm and then it was time to switch on the head lamps. It made me disorientated and giddy. We reached Anchorage Hotel at 8.30pm (59.8km).

One of the guys, Siegfried Milbert, who has done this challenge five times already, got to the river in the dark. He decided to sleep on the river bank and he crossed the next morning. We, in the meanwhile, have a quick shower, supper and pack bags again.

**Tuesday, February 8:** Blisters starting on both heels. I am stiff and tired. Rucksack still leaks. We have a breeze at least. Cross Mthatha River, then off to Coffee Bay. Then to White Clay. Colleen and I lose the rest of our team (Patrick and Eugene Martin). We carry on slowly – I see one of the most beautiful parts of the coast line – White Clay. We eventually catch up with George (Euvrard) and Kate (Godfrey). We get sworn at by a local, who showed us a short cut and was upset with the price we negotiated with him. At the Hole-in-the-Wall Hotel our team catches up with us. We have a swim in the pool and lots of cool drinks. I thought I was in paradise.

Crossing the river I was lying on my back with the Hole-in-the-Wall to my right (in very close proximity). It was really one of the most special moments in my life. We again got lost later and landed up in a very mushy and muddy river. The terrain remained full of climbs and grasslands and was tough.

We crossed Bulungula River and at the backpackers retreat we filled up with water and had plenty of cooldrinks.

Crossing the strong Xora river Colleen was convinced she saw and felt a sand shark. Did not do my nerves any good. Starting to get dark now. Eventually we saw the lighthouse. Time for headlamps. I'm disorientated again with the moon, the light of the lighthouse and the headlamp, but we survived and arrived at The Haven at 8.30pm (54km).

**Wednesday, February 9:** Start at 7am. First river is Mbashe (apparently shark-infested). Took us two hours to cross – 35 people and only two canoes. Siegfried's son swam across and got into serious trouble – had to be rescued and was unable to continue rest of the day. Terrain full of grasslands, which cut your body. I'm told afterwards that it is puffadder territory! However it allowed more running as we had long sandy beaches to run on. I'm able to appreciate the plants – *strelitzias*, *kniphophias*, different aloes and beautiful rock formations – as well as some beautiful forest paths. Several river crossings again today. Arrived at Kobb Inn at 4.40pm – my aim was to arrive during daylight. Bar lady told us our luck is in as the ferry closes at 5pm. Gulped down Coke and rushed down to river, only to find no ferry. As we swam through the river the ferry arrived – too late for us!

My first arrival in daylight – we finished at 6pm at Mazeppa Bay. Beautiful. Straight into pool again. First time I am experiencing chaffing between legs. Some of the guys were earlier walking like John Wayne as a result of the chaffing. I now understand why. At least I'm not stiff anymore, but blisters ever



**FEAST FOR THE EYES:** Novice Wild Coast challenger Heloise Uys is stunned by the beauty of the trail.



**WILD COAST SHUFFLE:** Organiser Dave Gassner crosses a river without getting his precious running shoes wet.



**RUNNER'S NIGHTMARE:** Blisters on a runner's foot after the first day on the trail.



**RUNNING REPAIRS:** Team doctor Peter Samuel's repair work on Heloise Uys' feet.

increasing.

I asked Doc Samuels to apply more plasters for the next day. Done 44km today.

**Thursday, February 10:** My feet have felt like they are on fire during the night. It started raining at around 1.30am. Start at 7am. Look like a mummy with all the bandages. Nice and cool. Route to Wavecrest is combination of sandy grassy areas, dunes – fairly flat (we got slightly lost in the dunes).

Landed nicely on my buttock (soft landing) when we crossed a mushy area and I hesitated to jump across with my tired legs.

River at Wavecrest strong and cold. We crossed in the wrong area and Colleen cut her finger and I got a nasty gash on leg. Staff at Wavecrest fantastic. They allowed us in with wet bodies. Gave us tea and scones and let us sit in lounge. Still raining outside and needless to say we stayed for almost an hour. I bought more plasters here – thought I could auction them tonight as it was becoming the most wanted item on the tour!

Bar lady went out in the rain to direct Chel Gassner (Dave's wife) where to cross the river – she stood in the rain until Chel was safe – thanks to her!

Cross Kobonqaba (known for electric rays, which I fortunately missed), down to Jacaranda. Saw many different flowers today.

Today we swam the rivers with shoes on as our feet were already wet from rain. Quite difficult to swim with such heavy feet, but managed. Arrived early at Trennerys after 32km.

**Friday, February 11:** Leave at 7.45am for Haga Haga. Saw fish eagle for first time at Kei River. Cross river on pont, then run on tarred road for the first time in five days. Ice cream and Coke at Morgan Bay Hotel.

Then through Double Mouth and Marshstrand, past oyster farms and arrive at Haga Haga nice and early, in time for swim in pool.

**Saturday, February 12:** Leave Haga Haga at 8am. Lots of soft sand. See dolphins for first time and a snake just outside Haga Haga. Rescue seagull caught in fishing line. Felt good to see it flying away. Did 28km and arrived at Yellow Sands at 1pm.

Team up with entrants of Surfers. Difficult to face all these people after a week of solitude. Struggled with Surfers – legs tired after more than 250km – but proud to have made it over finishing line!