

# DO IT NOW

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## Arran Brown on Preparing for the 2010 Cape Argus Cycle Tour

Building the  
**Ultimate**  
Land Cruiser  
Pickup

## Whisky Connoisseur?

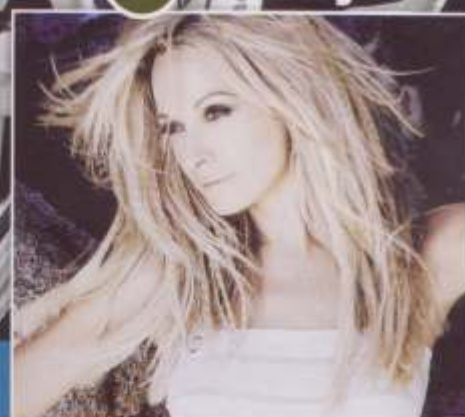
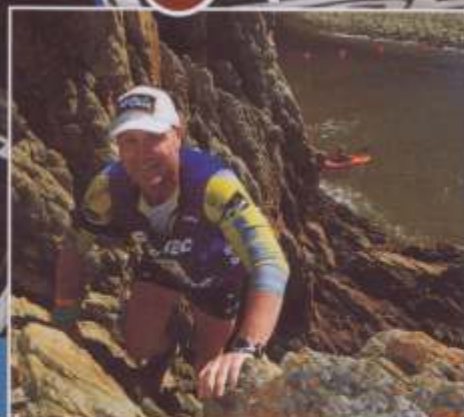
multi-stage race food

## Clean up! Kaokoland

> Adventure

> Sport

> Lifestyle



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## Map - Travelling SA p. 38 - 39

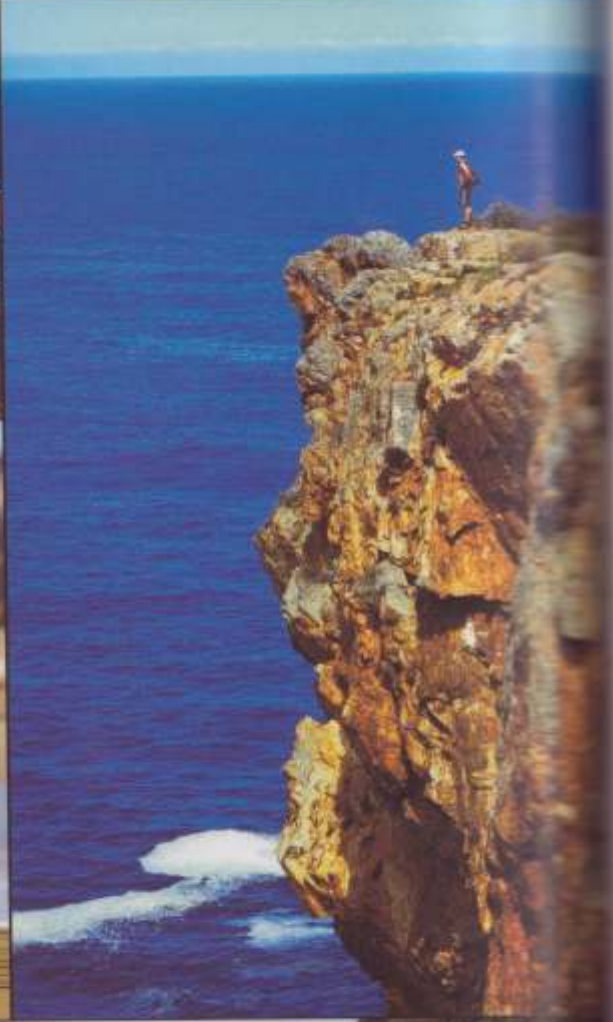
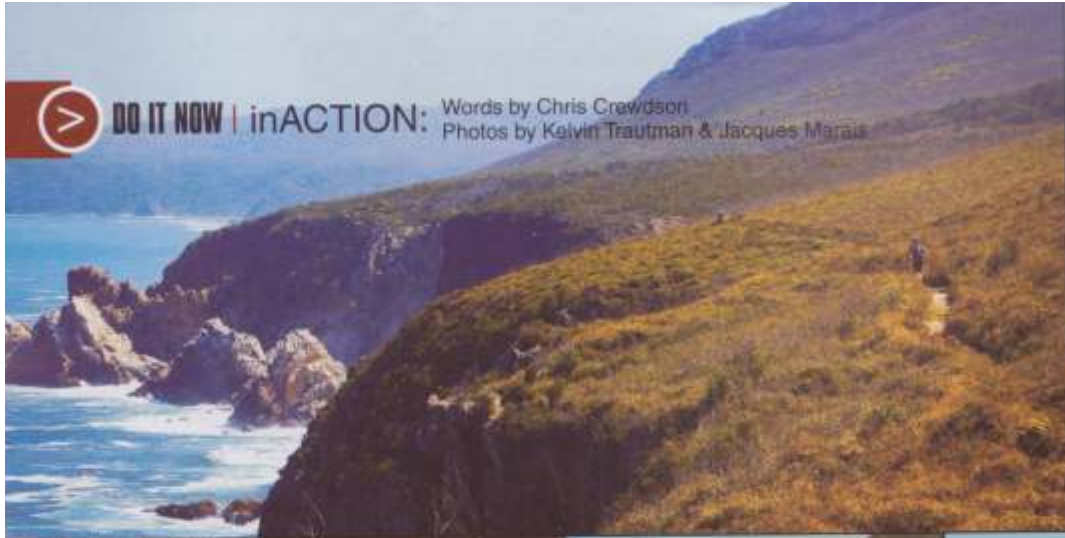
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TRAINING PROGRAMME



**DO IT NOW | inACTION:** Words by Chris Crowdsen  
 Photos by Kalviri Trautman & Jacques Marais



# THE OTTER - AFRICAN TRAIL RUN & Southern Storm Duathlon

## A Vision Worth Fighting For

*Hiking the iconic five-day Otter Trail is a challenge in itself and something many an outdoor enthusiast has included on their must do list, however it took the vision of one man to turn this hike into the ultimate five-hour middle distance trail run.*

John Collins of Magnetic South, best known for his Camel Trophy achievements and then for his foray into the world of adventure racing, had always believed that South Africa could offer the trail running community an event that would become the undisputed 'Holy Grail' of the trail running world. And so the Otter - African Trail run was born in 2009. Not only is it challenging, but the trail meanders through one of the most enchantingly beautiful areas in South Africa.

Turning his dream of a 'five days in five hours' event into a reality, was not an easy task! However, Magnetic South, based in the Garden Route, was in an ideal situation to take on this mammoth and seemingly-impossible task. Having organised events in 43 countries, the company has established an excellent track record in pulling off the impossible. And, the more folk believed this race was impossible, the more it motivated the organising team to make it happen.

Firstly, gaining the necessary permissions and buy-in from SANParks and the newly established Garden Route National Park (GRNP), to host the first-ever sports event on the highly eco sensitive Otter Hiking Trail, took 24 months of hard negotiations.

Understandably, SANParks and the GRNP would not allow this pristine stretch of coast to be utilised, until every detail had been scrutinised and all angles thoroughly investigated. If an event was to take place, it had to be done 100% by the book - their book! Nature Conservation Corporation, an independent body, was called in to consult on what would become the event's working document, the Environmental Management Plan. With extensive experience in this field, it was their responsibility to ensure the plan clearly spelt out Magnetic South and GRNP's obligations in terms of protecting this eco-sensitive environment, as well as their total adherence to the plan.

Next, a Field Management Plan needed to be formulated that would ensure the safety of every participant along the entire length of this very technical and remote trail. The local Mountain Rescue unit of the Mountain Club of SA (MCSA) was the logical choice in terms of handling the event's safety because of their experience with emergency rescues and evacuations of injured hikers on the Otter Trail. Crags local, Andrew Scott, who heads up this highly-committed volunteer group, was instrumental in helping formulate what was to become the most comprehensive Field Management Plan ever to be implemented on a local trail run. The location of the Otter Trail does not allow easy access either via land or sea and

the only viable option is to casevac via chopper. Scott and his team hold regular training sessions with the South African Air Force, to ensure their skills are constantly honed and in so doing, have established a strong partnership with the military in the process.

Lastly, the organisers were faced with the daunting task of convincing both SANParks and GRNP that they could carry out all the requirements as set out in the EMP. The only way to do this was to fully understand what the race would entail and this meant running the route themselves. More discussions followed with GRNP and finally, special permission was granted to the organisers to run the route at various times of the year, to determine the most ideal conditions in which to let loose a determined and competitive bunch of athletes on the iconic Otter Trail.

The Garden Route has recently suffered a number of flood years and earlier this year, the entire coast was thumped with abnormally high seas that destroyed much of what lay in its path. The Otter Trail was no exception, as much of the route is just above the high water mark over a myriad of rocky ledges and river mouths that are synonymous with the Tsitsikamma coast.

One of the main safety concerns of running the Otter was the unpredictable Bloukrans River crossing, which has unfortunately claimed a number of hiker's lives over the years the Otter has been operational. Anyone who has done the trail will know that your timing has to be spot on, as attempting the crossing on an outgoing or high tide is extremely hazardous. The river also has an extensive catchment area in the surrounding Tsitsikamma Mountains and with its narrow gorges, you have a treacherous obstacle to contend with that could prove fatal if attempted during heavy rains.

The scouting team has many a war story to tell about the four sanctioned runs that GRNP allowed Magnetic South to race the route. One, which still has the team chuckling, was John Collins' first test of the trail and how he had underestimated just how physically demanding this beast would be on the runners. Collins set off at dawn on a glorious summer morning, having planned his water points from the SANParks hiker's map. Armed with only a hydration belt and a couple of energy





bars, he set off enthusiastically down the single track in eager anticipation of what the route would unveil.

The first overnight-huts at Ngubu, 4.8 km from the start, passed by quickly. This first section was considered to be the trickiest as there was little time to adjust to the terrain, before being thrown into the technical rocky and root-strewn single tracks.

By Scott Hut, a further 7.9 km from Ngubu, John was starting to find his rhythm and by the halfway point, Otter at Oakhurst Huts, he was feeling that although the route was going to be a tough one, it was an achievable undertaking.

However, it was not until he had reached Bloukrans River, now 10 km west of Oakhurst Huts, that the lack of food was starting to kick in, big time. With no nutrition available, our intrepid scout was left with no choice but to raid the dustbins at the final overnight stop of Andre Hut and feast on some jam from a discarded jam jar, to get him through the final 6 km. The vultures were circling!

The Otter had struck its first blow and important lessons were learnt. The 42 km stretch was not to be taken lightly, and it could not be compared to anything else that fell in the same category, distance wise. This was definitely turning out to be the ultimate middle distance trail run that John had dreamt about; one that required optimal training and nutritional planning to get through it! With over 2 200 m of elevation across the 42 km, the route was also proving to be a knee cruncher of note, with cramping, rolled ankles and bruised toes just a few of the many difficulties our scouts experienced. Not to forget a run in with an aggressive Puff Adder, that instantaneously spiked the adrenals into overdrive! And with this, the realisation dawned that anyone who entered this race was in for an experience they would either want more of in the years to come, or never contemplate this madness again.

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## Running the HI-TEC OTTER

Such was the interest in the inaugural event of the Otter-African Trail Run, that it was sold out long before race day.

Event day on 20 September 2009 could not have been more perfect with warmish, dry conditions greeting the first batch of runners who left Storms River at sunrise. In order to seed the athletes into manageable batches, which could be accommodated on the predominantly technical single track, the organisers established an 5 km prologue route around Natures Valley and Salt River. It was important that the prologue simulated the mix of terrain the aspiring athletes would encounter on the Otter, and this was undertaken the day before.

A maximum field of 200 runners was allowed to traverse the Otter and understandably so, as rigid cut offs at various strategic points along the route enabled Magnetic South to monitor the field meticulously and avoid having anyone out on the course after dark, or when the tide turned at Bloukrans.

John Collins had realised his dream and having set a blistering time of 5hrs12 mins on his scout run, the big question everyone was asking was, could the five day Otter Hiking Trail be conquered in five hours?

John and Hi-Tec sponsored Iain Don-Wauchope, Rohan Kennedy, Bruce Arnett and many others, set up a fast and furious



pace, knowing that anyone, of a number of runners from the various batches, could take the title. Right from the start it was 'do or die' out there! Not to be outdone, the ladies race proved just as competitive and was dominated by Hi-Tec sponsored Su Don-Wauchope. The race was to become a husband and wife fairytale performance.

The finish line had been set up on the western bank of the Groot River in Natures Valley. However, the organisers had included a final last sting in the tail requiring the battle weary athletes to cross the 50 m wide river on floating wooden pallets that promptly sunk if the runner didn't perform this obstacle at speed. The Pennypinchers Crossing created a truly dramatic finale to what has to be the hardest 42 km trail run in South Africa.

A unbelievable performance from Iain Don-Wauchope, who had been looking over his shoulder for much of the race, achieved what had been considered impossible and snuck in under the magical five-hour mark to post his name into the record books with a 4:59:02 first-ever Otter – African Trail Run title. Hot on his heels was John Collins, who finished in 5:01:38, thus proving that his 'five days in five hours' vision was not an impossible dream!

Su Don-Wauchope kept the glory in the family and blitzed the ladies category in 5:58:07, to add her name to the record books.

What makes both these victories so impressive is that both Don-Wauchopes had entered the Southern Storm Duathlon as well, which included the Otter – African Trail Run as Stage One. There was still a further gruelling four days of mountain biking and trail running that would traverse the entire east to west length of the 350 km Garden Route National Park, from Tsitsikamma to Wilderness.

## FINAL RESULTS

### HI-TEC OTTER - African Trail Run

#### Male Open

1. Iain Don-Wauchope 4.59.02
2. John Collins 5.01.38
3. Rohan Kennedy 5.12.20

#### Female Open

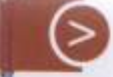
1. Su Don-Wauchope 5.58.07
2. Sarah Scott 6.25.59
3. Kirsty Scott 6.27.09

#### Male Vets

1. Nick Bester 5.33.04
2. Iain Morsehead 5.43.13
3. Nico Schoeman 5.59.37

#### Female Vets

1. Jacoline Haasbroek 6.09.24
2. Rhona Zonnestien 6.36.09
3. Monica Botha 7.55.05



## The Southern Storm

Set in the spectacular Garden Route National Park, the Southern Storm is a gruelling six-day individual duathlon, featuring trail running and mountain biking including the Otter Run as day two.

Having busted their guts on what could be regarded as the cruellest of opening stages, 88 'Storm Chasers', who had successfully conquered the Otter, now had to endure more physical and mental anguish on day three, which included another extremely technical and knee crunching route through the tough Robberg Peninsula. Although only 8 km long, the terrain is not one you would wish to contemplate with stiff and sore muscles.

The Otter had inflicted its damage and for these poor souls, it was a humbling sight to see some of the athletes take on the trickier sections on all fours.

The following three days would see the Don-Wauchopes clearly stamp their authority on the race, and claiming the daily Yellow Jersey was something they had both firmly set their sights on.

In an emotionally-charged final gala evening and prize giving, it was both Iain and Sue Don-Wauchope who had proven not only to themselves, but also to all those who had participated that the Southern Storm and Otter – African Trail Run had become experiences that every trail runner and mountain biker wants to add to their must do 'bucket list'.

### FINAL RESULTS - The Southern Storm

#### Male Open

1. Iain Don-Wauchope 19:05:37
2. David Labuschagne 19:25:25
3. Gas Van Aardenne 19:51:04

#### Female Open

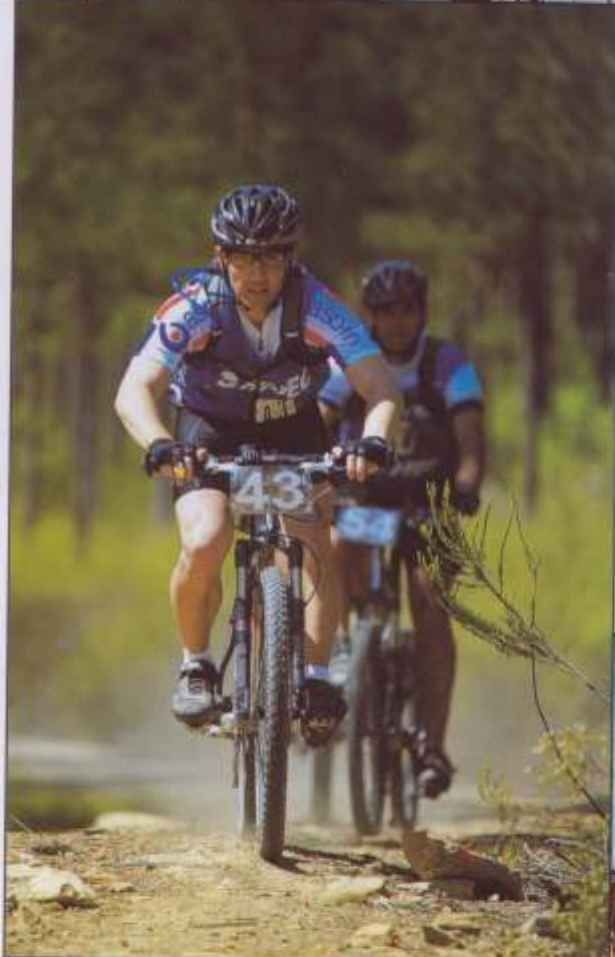
1. Su Don-Wauchope 22:11:56
2. Hanlie Booyens 23:25:16
3. Kirsty Scott 25:52:20

#### Male Vets

1. Nick Bester 20:19:47
2. Paul Wolff 21:43:48
3. Adrian Booyens 23:13:16

#### Female Vets

1. Rhona Zonnestein 25:09:09
2. Monica Botha 26:58:40
3. Heike Jakins 27:46:55



## The Pinnacle of an Active Lifestyle

Words by Iain Morsehead – Otter finisher: 5h43min

In more than 20 years of running, I have actively sought out and participated in the best events on offer.

Mount-aux-Sources, Rhodes, Sani Pass, The Harrismith Mountain race, Isandlwana, Bay to Bay, Donkey's Pass, Red Hill, Two Oceans, Comrades, Om-die-Dam, Loskop, Soweto, Dusi, Fish, IRONMAN, Kruger Park, Sabie Forest ... these are just a few of the organised events I have had the privilege of competing in and running through the most picturesque and interesting of places. I've even run trails over the mild undulations in the Western Cape that the locals refer to as mountains.

Lots of awesome memories, but I remain convinced that for me, and I guess for many others, the Otter will prove to be the pinnacle of an active lifestyle that we all enjoy so much. The pristine environment was matched stride for stride by your team, who turned the event into a wonderful and most enjoyable occasion.

The Otter Trail is a yardstick, a common unit of measure between trail runners and those 1 000's of people who have walked the trail. I have never experienced such interest in an event from non-runners, few of whom (if any) have or will ever walk a 21 km, marathon or ultra and therefore, have no understanding of what they entail. But the Otter is different; they have suffered and slogged over exactly the same terrain and can therefore relate and have a very real appreciation for what is involved. The joke is that my running mates can't believe that I took so long, while on the other hand, my hiking mate's can't believe that such a time is possible!



## Information about HI-TEC OTTER - African Trail Run

### ► When can the Otter Hiking Trail be Run?

The Otter hiking trail is only available to run on the one day allowed by the GRNP. Throughout the rest of the year, the trail is only open to the 12 hikers per day. Under no circumstances is anyone allowed to run this route and in doing so, will receive a life-time ban from the Tsitsikamma National Park and Otter Trail and face a fine.

### ► What Safety Precautions are there on the Bloukrans River Crossing?

Having scouted the route extensively, Magnetic South ensured that it had both a qualified Ropes and Water team in place to manage the crossing. Surf life saving swimmers were also used to cover any eventuality and the river conditions were constantly monitored throughout the event, with a back up detour should the river become impassable.

Non-motorised paddle craft and spare PFD's were kept on the water throughout the entire day for those athletes who could not swim or cramped in the sudden, colder conditions.

Three mobile paramedics were moved progressively along the route to respond to emergencies. Every emergency exit off the Otter Trail was manned by members of the organising crew, who checked athletes in and out of their marshalling points and had MCSA, GRNP and Rescue Runner Volunteers assist with first aid and emergency evacuations.

### ► How do I Enter?

Magnetic South has given first option to those who entered the event in 2009; however, entries not taken will be made available to the public at midnight on the 28 February 2010 when entries open.

Refer to the following websites [www.magneticsouth.net](http://www.magneticsouth.net) and [www.southernstorm.co.za](http://www.southernstorm.co.za)

### ► Is there a Cut Off on The Otter?

Yes, both along the route and at the end in order to qualify as a finisher. The cut offs along the route are strictly monitored and any athlete who doesn't make it on time, is taken off the course by members of the GRNP event team. Last year, the organisers allowed every finisher to be classified as a qualified Otter - African Trail Run finisher. However, the standard set for the 2010 event will require that you finish within the nine hours to qualify.

### ► Will the 2010 Southern Storm include The Otter?

Yes, the Otter - African Trail Run will continue to form the first stage of the Southern Storm Duathlon. But the route will change annually for the remaining four days on the Southern Storm so that it continues to showcase the very best of the region including parts of the Karoo. Entries will open at midnight on 28 February 2010 and again, previous competitors will be given first option prior to the event being opened to the public.