



No Frills. No Fuss Montagu Adventure Race Report

The dust has well settled after a memorable weekend in Montagu. The weekend saw over 100 racers participate in three different race distances, all in the rugged but stunning mountains surrounding Montagu.

It all started with the showcase event, the 45hr race, on Thursday at 17:00. With 11 teams on the startline, and many of the best in the country, it was bound to be an incredible race. To add some spice and hardship to it all, the Western Cape province of South Africa had received unprecedented amounts of rain over the previous 48 hours – rivers were bursting their banks, farmlands were flooded, bridges were washed away throughout the region. .

On the start line however, the race was given clear skies and beautiful sunshine, and luckily for their sake it stayed this way for the majority of the entire race.

The race got off to a hot start, with a fun little survivor-like/team building marble run challenge in order for the teams to earn their maps. They then built their bikes and proceeded onto a tough bike leg. Within the first 10kms all the teams were hike-a-biking, an NFNF standard it seems. Team Cyanosis got out to an early lead but were closely watched by Team Merrell Adventure, Team Merrell Songlines and Team Terra Mater.



All the teams made relatively swift work of the tricky terrain and navigation over the mountain and proceeded onto Simonskloof Mountain Retreat, their first transition, with little issue. At TA1, the teams would put on their trekking gear and hike 40kms over or through the Langeberg Mountain range to the Breede River. Leg 2's route choice is what made for such drama as five teams chose the route through the enormous river gorge and 6 teams chose the hike up and over. It turned out to be a significant 50/50 decision, so much so that it had team Terra Mater's two navigators debating over their different routes for 15 minutes. In summary, Terra Mater and the 5 other teams that chose the route over the mountain chose the better route in the conditions. The teams that chose the gorge route got presented with a dangerous flooding river that they had to navigate the entire way down, Team Merrell Songlines chose this route and made incredibly swift work of it but have some hair-raising stories to tell from it.

As sunrise broke on day two (16 hours into the race) Team Merrell Songlines were the first team onto the golden lit rolling hills near the Breede River. At this stage they had a 30 minute lead over Team Merrell and Terra Mater who had proceeded together for most of Leg 2,

Onto TA2, alongside the Breede River, where the teams were set to paddle 32 kms but due to a flooding river this was removed from the race. Thus, Leg 3 became a 155 km bike leg (as opposed to a 32 km paddle and 112 km bike). The race was clearly turning out to be a challenging expedition race, as most teams spent one hour in transition, which is relatively unheard of for the front teams.

Team Merrell Songlines were first to leave TA2, one hour ahead of Team Merrell and Terra Mater. They then managed to get across the Roberston-Mcgregor bridge, and over the Breede River. Only one hour later, when Terra Mater and Team Merrell arrived at the bridge (which was last closed to the public decades ago) was deemed impassable by the authorities. This left Songlines on their own course, an unfortunate situation but these dynamics are out of our control. All the trailing teams were rerouted onto the amended long course route, a 158 km route with more tar road riding but still a significant amount of tricky terrain and navigation.



Again, most teams seemed to progress well through the long bike leg and into their second night. Most teams took some strategic sleeps in the early hours of the morning as the sleep deprivation started to set in. The most notable Leg 3 performance was Team Cyanosis, who made up an entire 3 hours and rolled into TA3 one minute behind Team Merrell – an incredible comeback after their Leg 2 setback.

Team Merrell left TA3 in the early hours of the morning, whilst Cyanosis chose to get some much needed sleep. They were currently the course leaders but not necessarily the race leaders as Team Songlines were still on their full course bike leg (involving significantly tougher terrain, a few hike-a-bikes, many steep climbs, etc). As Team Terra Mater arrived at TA3, after a leg filled with mechanical issues, Cyanosis was waking up – The race for the podium was on, you could see it in the team's intensity!

Leg 4 was a sting in the tail as the teams turned North and headed over the Langeberg mountain range. Team Terra Mater's navigator, Craig Metherwell, summed it up best in response to his teammate saying "it's a typical Brundle leg, one CP on the one side, one on the other side and one enormous mountain in between".

The farmer of TA3 famously said that no one has ever tried to cross over the mountain, except Robert Le Brun (route course designer), and now all the participants that got that far. You can therefore imagine the terrain that awaited participants - steep slopes layered with fynbos thicker than a morning bowl of Mieliepap and taller than an elephants backside, coupled with some Tricky navigation made for a make or break leg for many teams.

Team Merrell, Pinegold, Songlines, Race Miere and Team Terra Mater produced fantastic navigation to eek their way forward and over the mountain. Team Cyanosis and Rustproof headed out onto Leg 4 but were stalled by the mountain and they decided to return to TA3, ending their race. Team Plett Adventure did not proceed with Leg 4 and withdrew at TA3.



We now had 5 teams still on course and with some nav choices still up for grabs, it was interesting to watch.

Team Merrell and Team Terra Mater remained in relative close proximity to each other despite different route choices. In the end, it was Team Merrell Adventure who rounded off an exceptional performance and finished in 45 hours. Unbeknown to them at the time, this would be good enough to take a well deserved win.

Team Terra Mater, Pinegold, Merrell Songlines and Racemiere all crossed the finish line to finish the 45hr course, in some way or form. Team Merrell Songlines were the only team to proceed on the original full course. However, they encountered a significant mechanical on one of their bicycles, and decided to split as a team to try and get the wheel fixed faster, transgressing the rules. After the consultation process with the ARWS referees, they were disqualified a few days after the race was completed.

NFNF also hosted a 6hr and 12hr race over the weekend. The 12hr race is aimed at the novice - experienced racers and the 6hr is aimed at newbies looking to get into the sport. The NFNF races were notorious for strong navigation and difficult terrain. This year - the aim was to create a challenging yet achievable course for the 12 hour teams. Teams completed the full course within 12 - 18 hours. We added a fun and spicy tourist orienteering leg - where teams had to find dates of historic buildings and flood dates over the Cogmans River Bridge.

In the end, it turned out to be a really exciting race as the lead changed hands multiple times between QC and Namaqua. QC showed their experience, whereby they picked up the pace later in the race. This ultimately gave QC a well deserved win. The race for third was equally as interesting with CBK Reborn and Dirty Four Play getting into a 2hr long final sprint. Dirty Four Play smashed it and took the final spot on the imaginative podium.



All the teams over the respective distances were welcomed with a juicy boerewors roll and warm smoor sauce and of-course, a Jack Black Beer.

Special thanks to all our sponsors, volunteers and land owners. A race of this capacity does not happen alone, not even close.

See you next year,

Robert Le Brun (Brundle)