

PICS: Running with dolphins and whales on the Wild Coast

2016-09-27 19:30 - Louzel Lombard

“The northeasterly wind pushes us back, whipping up the sand and the sea spray, we lean in, squinting up the beach towards the next river. We pull our dry bags out for our backpacks, leaving our shoes on – there are too many rivers to cross and we don't know what we might stand on in the water.

The tide is going out and the current tugs us as we aim for the opposite bank, we drift over, further downstream and stumble onto dry sand. We run on, dripping, shoes squelching, the waves rushing up the beach to greet us. Mussels, cowries, conches, oyster shells and dry seaweed crunch underfoot, rock pools glisten and beckon, the remains of wrecks disintegrate into ghosts marooned on the high tide.

The sand softens and our gait slows to treacle. Ahead, past a cluster of lazing Nguni on the beach, a steep grassy hill marked with a single bush, looms. We clamber over rocks, and seize our legs on the climb. We gaze down from the top, the hill rolling down onto a rocky cliff, the ocean pounding its base.

We run on, past Aloes and Euphorbia, looking out beyond the waves to Southern Right whales breaching and blowing plumes into the wind and pods of Bottlenose dolphins catching the swells. On far hills, turquoise huts with DSTV dishes, sit amidst women bent into their washing, men gathering and the endless rush of children, dogs, goats and small black pigs.”

This is how Wildrunner Susan Parker-Smith describes her experience running along SA's most rugged and untouched coastline in the recent Wildcoast Wildrun.



You can see more photos of the Wildcoast Wildrun here: [PICS: Running with dolphins and whales along the Wild Coast](#)

Starting in Kei Mouth and ending at Hole-in-the-Wall near Coffee Bay, the three-day, 112 km race offers runners a heady mix of incredible coastline scenery, rural life and remote beach running.

This year the Wildcoast Wildrun, which took place in September, was split into two departures, a Race for serious competitors, and a Journey for the more scenic, social runners, with the daily distances over the three-day event ranging from 34 - 44km.

Mark Middleton won the race in 11:39:33 and Jenny Janisch was the first lady home in 14:31:05.

According to race organiser Owen Middleton, the event format is simple. Each day, the runners follow a general route, northwards, but have the freedom to choose their own path, keeping the sea on their right and only signing in at the checkpoints.

“The terrain includes beach running, narrow cattle trails and grassy headlands, rocky coastline and some jeep track - With river mouth crossings of varying depths so runners have to be able to swim to participate in the event,” Middleton says.

The event is fully supported after race fees are paid, and participants sleep in the local seaside hotels every night, enjoying the legendary Wild Coast buffets, and the option of daily massages from physios.

The Wild Coast is a section of coast in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, stretching from East London in the south to Port St Johns in the north. Set in an extremely remote and rural area of South Africa, the rugged coastline is largely untouched and unspoilt by modern civilisation.

It is a breathtaking natural environment, comprising of long white beaches, crystal waters, rolling grassy hills, indigenous forests and deep-cut ravines typical of the east coast of South Africa.

Interested in running next year? The 2017 Wildcoast Wildrun will have only one departure and is limited to 80 participants. Get more info and [check availability online](#).



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