

**SOUTH AFRICA
DRAKENSBERG
“THE SKY RUN”
APRIL 2008
By Karen Hauptfleisch**

- a) The 10 summits on the skyrun
- b) The mountaineer's/hiker's/idiots version of the skyrun
- c) Doing the skyrun barefoot/in crocs/on one leg
- d) How to cross the 39 fences on the skyrun

I'll leave it in your hands to choose the report's heading ☺

Day 1: (8 km): Exploring a new part of the Berg was the only requirement I had. When Pieter suggested doing the skyrun, I had to do some research. The only information I got was that it was an adventure race (Ultra marathon) over 120km + and lasted about 2 days. Thinking we need at least some sleep, I stupidly thought we could do it in 4 days. I contacted all the farmers to get permission and on Friday the 25th of April 2008 we left Pretoria. On the way to Lady Grey, Pieter showed me the maps and all the peaks we were going to summit. Still terrible with navigation, I just nodded my head. Once in Lady Grey, Otto Oertel from the Mountain Inn Hotel took us with his Caravelle to Tiffendele, pointing at the peaks Pieter couldn't stop talking about. 5 Minutes after Otto dropped us at Tiffendele Ski Resort – we discovered our hiking sticks were still in his kombi. Thank goodness for cellphones. 10 minutes later we were on our way to Ben Macdui with our hiking sticks. We tried to get as much of the snow that was still left behind after the previous weekend's fall. Since it was cold and getting dark, we pitched the tent after 8km and got into our sleeping bags immediately.



Phil trying to get through the snow

Day 2: (19 km) One can only sleep so long and we started hiking at 7h30 and headed straight for Edgehill. We were informed by everyone associated with the skyrun to turn left at a certain point but since we were adventurous/mountaineers/idiots we decided to head straight up. This would mean a 20km shortcut and how difficult can it be?



We had to struggle to get past bushes like this. Needless to say, some repairs to our clothes were necessary.

Two hours later, we were back at the place the adventure racing experts told us to turn left. Okay, maybe it is not so safe going over the cliffs if you don't know what's waiting on the other side. Going down the mountain took ages and we battled with vegetation resembling rose bushes. We didn't want to go down to the road since it would mean another 10 km. Decisions decisions. We could go down the road the adventure racers

Sunrise on Africa's Peaks – Sky Run

take and hike right into the night or we could try contouring again. We tried the contouring bit again. After 4 hours, 15 fence crossings and thousands of the rose bushes, we pitched our tent.

Day 3: (13 km) We started hiking at 7h30 again. According to Pieter, we had to make up for lost time. Belloch peak was waiting. Unfortunately I didn't read my boots' washing instructions and leaving them to dry in the sun I presume, was not something they recommend. My toes were in agony and part of the morning's hike was done barefoot and part in Phil's imitation Crocs. Pieter's dream of making up for lost time was shattered. Going up was time consuming (with me it was one step forward, 2 steps sliding back).

It was time to make decisions again. Pieter would go up and myself and Phil would slide along slowly. Two hours later, we made it to the top as well. Pieter was stuffed. It took him an hour to get to Belloch peak and back and he's energy level was at an all time low. Decisions, decisions. We started contouring. "Pieter, is this part of the skyrun?" I asked two hours later. "No, the skyrun is way over there!" By this time, I have regained my sense of humour. We were doing our own proper skyrun. We were surrounded by beautiful mountains. We decided to camp once the clouds moved in and to wake up early to make up for lost time. Pieter also mentioned a change of plan. By 18h00 Pieter and Phil were snoring!



One of the 39 fences we had to cross



Spectacular sunset

Day 4: (19 km). We started hiking at 6h00 and by 8h00 Phil's knee has given in. The going was slow but the view was absolutely breathtaking. I could do with new feet but it was really worthwhile. We stopped at 15h30 below Avoca Peak. We watched a spectacular sunset and the guys couldn't stop talking about food (especially meat). I kept everyone awake doing 23 Sudokos. So much for bonding. But I did say on day 1 that we were either going to kill one another or bond!

Day 5: (12 km). Why do I enjoy summiting peaks? Well, the view from Avoca explains it all. It was breathtaking. We were on top of the clouds. Another long spectacular hike on a ridge

followed. Phil was still battling with his knee. We camped below Snowdon peak at 13h00. At 14h00 Pieter and myself hiked to Snowdon peak. A lazy cold afternoon followed and by 18h00 we were all in bed, hoping for snow.



The view from Avoca Peak

Day 6: (23 km). We woke up at 5h00, expecting snow but were greeted by mist. We waited till sunlight and since the mist was not disappearing we decided to hike down. We bumped into several quadbikers. Phil was keen to phone Otto for a lift and when Pieter said it's a thing of pride walking to the hotel, Phil said

Sunrise on Africa's Peaks – Sky Run

he lost his pride when he turned 30. Unfortunately Pieter is only 29 ³/₄. The only car we saw hiking down/up the road stopped to ask where we were going. Phil, still limping but not limping enough shouted: "We came from Tiffindele". "Well, pop in for coffee at Olympus", the lady replied before speeding off. I was keen to hike to the hotel (idiot since it was still another 19km and my feet were already looking for a new owner) to fetch Cutie but Pieter convinced me that it was not such a great idea. Coffee at Olympus lead to supper at Olympus. Maureen, Leo and Kathy – Lee were extremely hospitable and after nice red wine and a lovely meal (when Phil asked what vintage (apparently it was the best wine he has ever tasted), Maureen replied Box wine!) we went to sleep. We were all snoring by 21h30.

Day 7: (19 km). We were on the road by 4h30. 19 km of bird watching and some interesting conversations followed. Pieter's shoes were finally ready for the museum and he suffered a bit with blisters. When we reached the first house in Lady Grey, we were greeted by a lady, Helene Du Preez who was very impressed with our hiking and picking up litter. We were invited for coffee but nothing could stop the guys from having some meat first. (They were talking to the cows on our way down). After a nice bath and something to eat, we went for coffee at Helene's place. Pieter was invited to develop hiking trails and we visited till late. All plans to sleep a bit forgotten. Back at the hotel, it was once again time for the boys to eat some meat! We chatted to Otto and Dalene and going to bed I was a bit sad, I have met wonderful people the past two days. Hopefully I'll have an opportunity to meet them again.



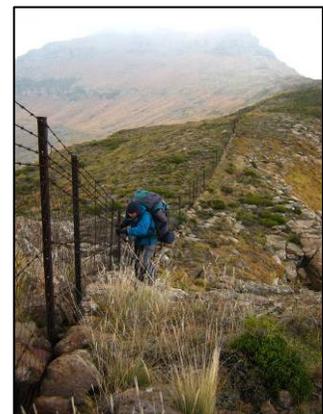
Having breakfast in the road just before sunrise and Joubert pass



One of the highlights of the hike.



Trying to save my toes!



Still on the ridge.