

THE KALAHARI AUGRABIES EXTREME MARATHON

The Kalahari Augrabies Extreme Marathon will be run for the 16th successive year in 2015 and is being recognized as one of the best organized self-sufficient stage races



on the international calendar. The race is run through the Augrabies National Park and surrounding farmlands in the Kalahari Desert in the west of South Africa bordering on Namibia.

The race format follows that of other multistage races and is run over 7 days in 6 stages. The daily distances for 2015 are 25km, 34km, 40km, 81km, 47km and 25km respectively. Day 5 after the long stage is

classified as a 'rest' day, but the reality being that runners are still arriving in the camp on day 5 in completing the 81km run. To add to the challenge, a significant portion of the long run is deliberately run at night with runners coming face-to-face with some of the desert occupants including various large cats and a variety of buck. Needless to say, headlamps are compulsory equipment.



The terrain varies considerably from relatively open desert with limited scrub, to climbing mountains, following sandy river beds and over rubble beds. October is the

hottest time of year in the Kalahari, with day temperatures rising to as high as 50°C with occasional dust storms, and night temperatures dropping to around 5°C.



The race is self-sustaining – runners are provided with 1.5litres of water at each



water point (sited approximately 8km apart) and 4.5litres on entering camp at the end of each stage. The 4.5 litre bottle is for use in preparing food, rehydrating and replenishing water bottles for the start of the next stage, after which not a great deal is left. The night 'camps' are little more

than top cover to keep condensation off the runners, and are sited in different localities each night. Other than water and the cover at night, the runners carry all provisions by way of food, emergency gear, medical kit, bedding and clothing.

Runners must start the race with carrying a minimum of 14,000 calories of nutrition, with pack weights at the start varying on average from 8.5kg to 12.5kg dry before adding 1 ½ litres of water. For perspective, a 65kg runner starting with 17,000 calories and running at an average rate of 7.5km per hour will burn around 31,000 calories in total during the event, and lose around 3.5kg of body mass in the process. Carrying more food increases the weight burden, decreases running pace, increases the resultant calorific 'burn', and increases the risk of injury. It thus becomes a fine balancing act between taking adequate nutrition to sustain running, and too much nutrition which is equally disastrous for the reasons given. Equally, consuming

insufficient nutrition during the race can also result in runners being unable to run and 'hitting the wall'.



The race is closely monitored by a medical team who watch for undue stress. In the event that a runner collapse, which does happen on occasion, should he require two or more drips in succession to recover, he is withdrawn from the race. Blisters are common needing close attention in the camps between stages.



What kind of person competes in such events? Apart from the elite competitors, the bulk of the field share little in terms of physical attributes, with runners coming in all shapes and sizes. Additionally, many have never done a multi-stage race before and are venturing into

unknown and scary territory. Curiously, most runners come from senior positions within their work environments, all have incredible self-belief, all are incredibly positive and have very realistic and balanced worldviews in general. As such, extreme events of this nature represent a personal challenge to further probe the limits of their own ability in a setting that is stark but beautiful in its own way, and amongst like-minded people. Many lasting friendships are formed during the race despite the mix of



nationalities and widely differing countries of origin. Apart from further seeking the limits of their own 'envelopes', most runners use their participation in the race to raise moneys for select charities, with that altruistic trait common amongst the competitors.