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CANSA Berg River Challenge 2008


By Rika Vollgraaff



Along the way the participants stopped at local schools to involve children with cancer awareness. Food packages, sport equipment, educational toys and Metropolitan gear were distributed. Children were encouraged to make posters about healthy living and they entertained the CANSA Berg River Project participants with singing and dancing.

Day 1

The 2008 journey started with a breakfast at the Police Barracks in Huis Paarl Vallei, where the Mayor of Paarl wished the teams all the best and a safe journey. Before boats started the first leg of 60 km to Zonquasdrift, well-known Afrikaans singer and personality Danie Niehaus held a wreath-laying ceremony in honour of all people that died of cancer this year.

The pilot boat (Gys Boonzaaier and Etienne Marais) for day one had young Suzaan Nelson, this year's Reach for a Dream cancer patient, on board, and they led the pack of seven boats to a local community called 'Skooltjie' where Metropolitan gear and Bakers mini cricket sets were once again distributed. 

Every year for the past 17 years a group of 20 individuals has taken on the Berg River in inflatable boats to raise money for CANSA. This year on the 23rd July the three founding members, Danie Niehaus, Attie Laubscher and Gys Boonzaaier, along with 17 other men, started their journey in Paarl and arrived at the West Coast town of Velddrif on the 27th July 2008.



Etienne Marais & Suzaan Nelson



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Hardus Zevenster, Dirk Gallowitz, Johan van der Watt, Danie Coetzee, Dewald Visser, Dirk Laubscher, Rudi van Wyk.

After the volunteers arrived at Zonquasdrift, boats were transported to Gouda Hotel where the teams stayed overnight. Various wines from Beyerskloof were auctioned off at the first auction as well as a variety of sport memorabilia and trips on the Rat Race Media Adventurer.

Day 2

On the second day of the race, Leon Smith handed the Floating Trophy and Yellow Jersey for Sportsmanship over to Kiewiet Vermeulen. Vermeulen had a lot of boat trouble during the first day, but still managed to pull through. On day two, the teams drove to Zonquasdrift to begin the 65 km section to Misverstand Dam (near Moorreesburg). This time Jan Koekemoer and Danie Coetzee were in the pilot boat leading the way. Dirk Gallowitz had gearbox trouble earlier on, and was picked up by the land crew. After another successful auction and a very entertaining fashion parade by the youngsters and newcomers in the group, participants overnighed at Misverstand Dam guesthouse.



BACK: Attie Laubscher, FRONT: Leon Smith and Hardus Zevenster

Day 3

On Friday morning the young Namibian Leon Smith, who was the favourite of the previous night's fashion show, was handed the Floating Trophy and Yellow Jersey by Dewald Visser, CEO of Rat Race Media. Dirk Laubscher and Polla Coetzer were in the pilot boat on the



Danie Coetzee and Jan Koekemoer.



BACK: Reneé Sabor, FRONT: Hardus Zevenster and Leon Smith.

65 km stretch to the farm Houmoed, where the boats were loaded onto trailers and driven to the Riviera Hotel at the West Coast town of Velddrif.

Thanks to Jacques Swart from GMW Vredenburg, teams were treated to a well-deserved dinner, and to complete the day's activities, yet another successful wine auction was held at the Vlakvarkgat Bush Pub near Langebaan.

Day 4

On the last day the teams travelled 55 km from the farm Kersefontein back to Velddrif, with Etienne Marais proudly wearing the Yellow Jersey, received from Hardus Zevenster of Radio Tygerberg.

The history

The Berg River floods of 1990 got Attie Laubscher (who had been involved with the Trans Agulhas for 13 years) thinking, and quickly ideas developed on how to use the river for CANSAs projects. In 1991, Laubscher and his two friends, Gys Boonzaaier and Afrikaans singer Danie Niehaus, started "a trip to nowhere." Within four days they raised the first money for CANSAs, a total of R6 400. It took the participants only 15 years to raise their first million rand. Laubscher says they plan to raise the next million within the next six years.

Laubscher says the CANSAs Berg River Challenge has come a long way

since 1991. "Many people thought this was just another excuse to 'get away from home,' but the sponsorships from Metropolitan and Rola Motor Group, as well as all the coverage received over the past years, proved everybody wrong. This challenge is not a race, it is a handful of volunteers participating in an event as proud ambassadors for CANSAs.

This year, five of the seven boats were Pencil boats, and the other two were River Riders. According to Laubscher the success of the project is in many ways dependant on the farming community along the riverside.

Beyerskloof has been involved with the CANSAs Berg River project for the last two years. According to Pieter Kruger from Beyerskloof, they "truly believe in the cause," and are honoured to be part of the Challenge.

A total of R180 000 was raised over the period of four days in the 2008 CANSAs Berg River Challenge. To lead up to the Challenge, Radio Tygerberg organised a "Jail & Bail," where Cape Town businessmen were "arrested" and had to pay bail to be released, all in good spirit for CANSAs.

Without the generous sponsorships of Rat Race Media, Metropolitan, Rola Motor Group and Radio Tygerberg, the CANSAs Berg River would not have been such a great success. Rat Race Media filmed all the action and the CANSAs awareness for a half hour show to be broadcasted on KykNet soon.

The Namibia River Challenge, organised by Leon Smith, Dewald Visser and Attie Laubscher, is taking place in Namibia from 5 – 11th October 2008. Ten Inflatable boats from South Africa will compete against 10 boats from Namibia to raise money for the Organisation for the Empowerment of Widows/Widowers and Orphans of HIV and AIDS in Namibia (OEWONA).

For more information, or to make a contribution to the CANSAs Berg River Challenge or the Namibia River Challenge, contact Dewald Visser at dewald@ratracemedia.com or call (021) 880 1482. ■



BACK: Polla Coetzer and Dirk Laubscher, FRONT: Attie Laubscher.