FREEDOM CIRCUIT

700km / 400km

NON-STOP - SELF SUPPORTED - GPS - MTB RACE

RACE MANUAL

1st EDITION : SOUTHERN DRAKENSBERG

27 April – 2 May 2021

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Introduction

The Freedom Circuit is an extremely challenging self-supported bike packing race which will take place in South Africa in late April – early May annually. The route may change from year to year and will often incorporate large portions of the Freedom Trail.

There is a short and a long course route offering with fairly challenging cut-offs on the long route so night riding is required. The route is not marked. Riders are required to carry their own GPS devices for navigation and must follow the designated route. Very little is offered in the way of formal support on the course but detailed route information is provided in terms of distances between resupply points, lodging options, safe camping areas, water availability.

This is a self-supported event. Riders must carry everything they require including mandatory equipment. Riders may not receive any personal support/seconding whilst in competition. All riders will carry satellite trackers with 2-way communication for live tracking and emergencies but essentially competitors take responsibility for their own safety.

Event Details

Distance Options

- 700km Full Course (12300m Ascent)
- 400km Short Course (7400m Ascent)

Location

The race will start and finish at **Bushman's Nek Resort,** near Underberg, KZN.

The route traverses the base of the Southern Drakensberg mountains in a 'circular' route through the Meholding region historically known as *"No Mans Land".* See Route for more detailed info.

Bushman's Nek Resort, situated in the picture-perfect foothills of the Southern Drakensberg, offers accommodation in a selection of hotel rooms, self-catering apartments and rustic log cabins. There is a restaurant, wellness spa, horse riding and loads of entertainment for the whole family.

Dates and Times

Monday, 26 April 2021

- 18h00 Compulsory race Briefing for long and short course together (conference room)
- Dinner after briefing on guest's / riders own account

Tue 27 April 2021

- 7h00-8h30 Buffet Breakfast for riders at Bushman's Nek
- 08h30 Assemble at start and final questions
- 09h00 Race Start (long and short course together)

Sun 2 May 2021

- 09h00 Race Finish cut-off
- 09h30 Buffet Brunch and prizegiving at Bushman's Nek

Cut-offs

Final Cut-off

- 120 hours at Finish line (long and short course)

Interim Cut-offs (applicable to long course only)

- 230km - 36 hours (CP2: Short Course turn-off)
- 300km – 48 hours (CP3: Mvumane Store)

Short Coursing

Riders who miss an interim cut-off will be re-routed to short course and still eligible for short course 'official finish' if they reach the finish-line within the allotted 120 hours.

Entry Fees

Long Course

- Early entry (paid before 31 Aug 2020)_____R4,500 incl. VAT
- Normal entry_____R6,000 incl. VAT

Short Course

- Early entry (paid before 31 Aug 2020)_____R4,000 incl. VAT
- Normal entry_____R5,000 incl. VAT

Entry Terms & Conditions

- Deadline for entry is 1st March 2021
- Entry only secured once paid in full
- Withdrawal before 25 March receives 70% refund or 90% rollover credit
- Withdrawal before 25 April received 40% refund or 70% rollover credit
- Withdrawal after 25 April is non-fundable nor 'roll-overable'
- If event does not take place due to *Force Majeure*, pandemic or political unrest then rollover to postponed date or following year will be offered at no extra cost or 90% cash refund option
- By entering the event you agree to abide by race rules and sign indemnity form

Entry Fee Includes

- Live satellite tracking during competition including tracker rental (R500 discount if you use your own connected tracker (SPOT Gen3 or Garmin inReach)
- Emergency support and first aid (event medics and doctor-on-call)
- Organization of emergency evacuation
- Pre-start breakfast
- Prize giving brunch
- Access to all professional event photos and videos
- Race office support whilst in competition
- Finishers trophy

Entry Fee Excludes

- Accommodation pre, during and post event
- Food other than aforementioned breakfasts
- Evacuation from route whether emergency or elected (Race office will coordinate logistics but not cost thereof)

Accommodation Bookings

All pre-event, post-event and family accommodation bookings can be made directly through Bushman's Nek Resort:

- Website: https://www.bushmansnek.co.za
- Online reservations: https://reservations.bushmansnek.co.za/
- Phone: +27 33 701 1460

Book 3 nights and save 25% Book 4 nights and save 30% (offer valid till end July 2020)

Accommodation bookings at Bushman's Nek are first come, first serve so book early to avoid disappointment.

Getting There

Driving

Start/Finish venue is 250km from Durban and 600km from JHB. Secure parking will be available at host resort during competition.

Flying and Airport Shuttle

The closest airport is King Shaka International in Durban. Airport shuttle service is available and can be booked on entry form. Cost is R775 per person for return trip as follows:

DATE	DEPARTS	TIME	ARRIVE	TIME
Mon 26 April 2021	King Shaka Airport (DBN)	12h00	Bushman's Nek Resort	15h30
Sun 2 May 2021	Bushman's Nek Resort	12h00	King Shaka Airport (DBN)	15h30

Race Route

Overview

The route traverses the Southern Drakensberg foothills between Underberg and Naudes Nek Pass using gravel roads, jeep tracks, cattle paths, single-track and a very occasional snippet of tar road.

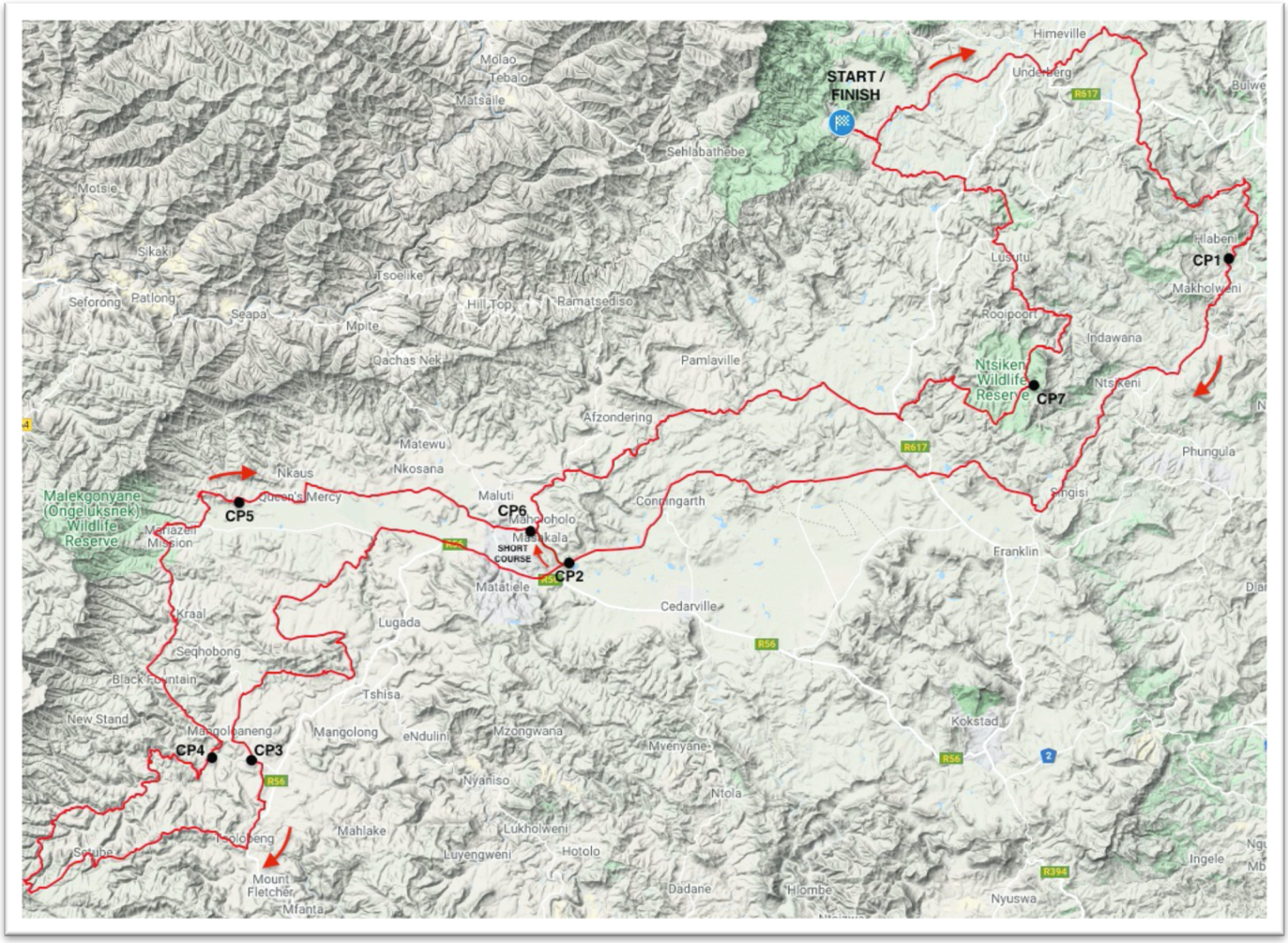
The route incorporates approximately 300km of the already established Freedom Trail although most of this is done in reverse to *Freedom Challenge* events. The Freedom Trail follows the route commonly taken by Trappist Monks linking mission stations as they headed into the area previously known as Noman's Land. It takes in interesting countryside that is rich in history and culture.

Terrain

The terrain is very undulating with few very portions of prolonged flat road. Gravel roads link the more interesting valleys and mountain passes, which often incorporate disused vehicular tracks and cattle tracks form mainly from oxen dragging firewood down the mountains. There are some exceptionally fun flowing paths and technically challenging portions, even un-ridable in parts. There are no prolonged hike-a-bike sections as found in the traditional Freedom Challenge events but you will have dismount and walk up and down steep rocky sections from time to time. Route surface is approximately:

50% Gravel Road
25% Jeep Track
20% Single-track / cattle paths
5% Tar Road

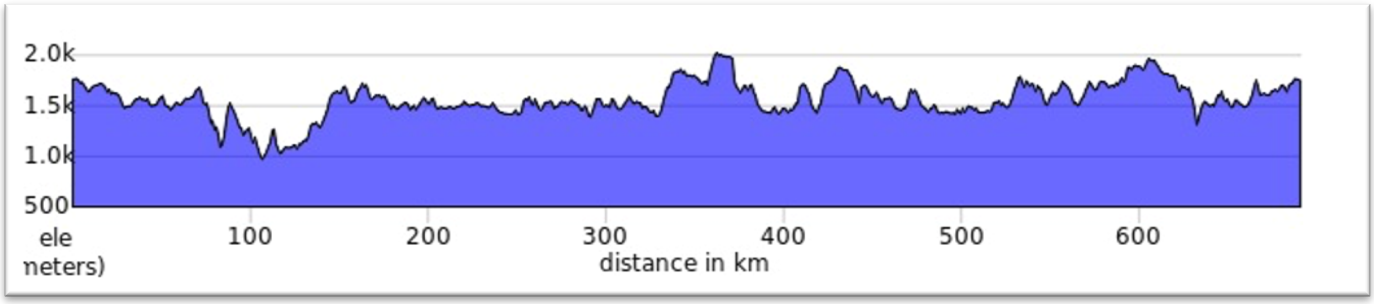
Route Map



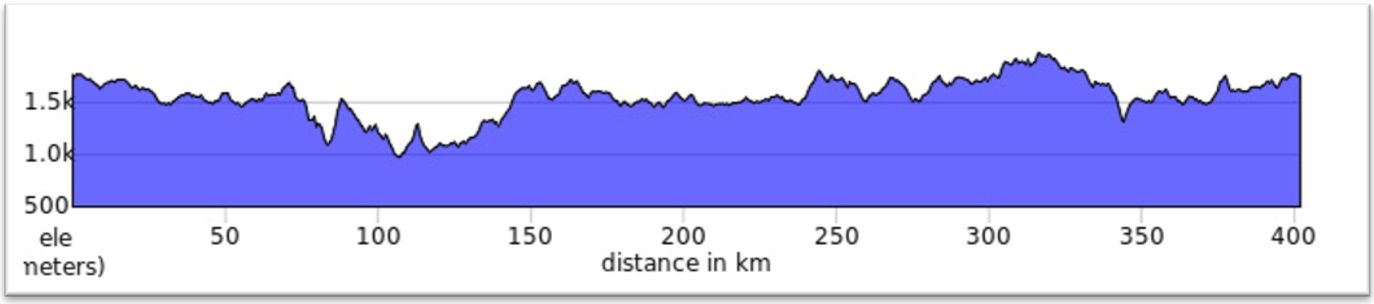
*Available for download on RideWithGPS.

Elevation Profile

Long Course



Short Course



Resupply Splits

CP split (km)	Water split (guaranteed availability)	Line item split (km)	Distance (km)	Category	Name	Comment
108	35	0	**0**	Start	Bushman's Nek Resort	Host Resort
		35	**35**	Re-supply	Underberg (town)	Variety of shops and restaurants
	73	40	**75**	Water	Tap near Qulashe Clinic	Go straight at right turn - 500m off route
		33	**108**	CP 1	Centocow	Water, electricity, soup and bread available. 16 Beds.
116	57	2	**110**	Spaza store	Esibomvini Store	LHS before right turn. Closes
		7	**117**	Shop	Loretta General Dealer	LHS after Ngwangane bridge
		16	**133**	Spaza store	Zamazisa store in Ntsikeni Village	Next to Police Station
		21	**154**	Camping	154km -171km	Less populated portion- better suited for wild camping
		11	**165**	Accomm.	Flitwick Ranch	RHS - 500m off route
		0	**165**	Restaurant	Flitwick Deli	RHS - 150m off route. Tap water available 24 hours.
	7	7	**172**	Shop	Swartberg	RHS after left turn. Tap available 24 hours.
	60	52	**224**	CP2	Farmgate LHS	Unmanned (sign-in sheet behind wall) cut-off 36 hours
94		1	**225**	Short Course	Short course turn-off	Turn Right to Masakala
		7	**232**	Re-supply	Mataiele (town)	Variety of shops, take-aways and accommodation
	86	51	**283**	Spaza store	Kopanang Store, Qhobosheaneng	RHS before right bend - 100m off route
		21	**304**	Water	Tap at School	RHS through gate - 150 off route
		14	**318**	CP3	Mvumane Store	Cut-off 48 hours. Head directly to CP4 to short course
100	64	0	**318**	Spaza store	Mvumane Store	Shop open 24/7 for race
		1	**319**	Camping	Lady of Lourdes Chruch	Safe camping and water available
		28	**347**	Spaza store	Zanazo store	RHS next to tavern
		5	**352**	Water	Tap near Qulashe Clinic	LHS
		6	**358**	Camping	Lehanas 358km - 372km	Less populated portion- better suited for wild camping
		24	**382**	Water	Vuvu School	Water, food and safe camping available
	36	4	**386**	Camping	Vuvu valley 386km - 391km	Less populated portion - better suited for wild camping
		32	**418**	CP4	Tinana - Mrs Kibi's House	Water, food and beds available. 8 Beds.
102	42	6	**424**	Camping	Black Fountain 424km - 440km	Less populated portion- better suited for wild camping
		17	**441**	Water	Reservoir	Reservoir above Koebung village - drinking water
		19	**460**	Accomm.	Malekgolonyane Chalet	Water, food, safe camping and 16 beds available.
	16	16	**476**	CP5	Mparane Chalet	Water, food, safe camping and 12 beds available.
	44	4	**480**	Spaza store	Mparane Store	RHS just after junction
		7	**487**	Spaza store	Queens Mercy shop	LHS - 200m before old shop (now closed)
		33	**520**	CP6	Masakala Guest House	Water, electricity, food, camping and 16 beds available.
98	41	17	**537**	Camping	Shenxa Valley 537km - 542km	Less populated portion- better suited for wild camping
		7	**544**	Spaza store	Shenxa superstore	RHS after turning right onto main road
		7	**551**	Camping	Ulittle Mzimvubu 546km - 551km	Less populated portion- better suited for wild camping
		2	**553**	Water	Mbombo	Few communal taps available
		8	**561**	Water	St Xavier Mission	Water available and safe camping
	57	15	**576**	Spaza store	Glen Edward	LHS
		17	**593**	Camping	593km - 624km	Less populated portion - better suited for wild camping
		25	**618**	CP7	Ntsikeni Lodge	Water, food, safe camping and 12 beds available.
73	73	14	**632**	Water	Taps in Esikolweni	Few communal taps available
		10	**642**	Camping	642km - 647km	Less populated portion - better suited for wild camping
		19	**661**	Accomm.	Coleford Lodge	Water and accommodation - 400m off route LHS
		30	**691**	Finish	Bushman's Nek Resort	Host Resort

*Short Course is 8km from CP2 – CP6

Self-supported

This is a self-supported event. Riders must carry everything they require including mandatory equipment (listed below) for the duration of the ride. Riders may not receive any personal support/seconding whilst in competition.

There is food and accommodation available at some of the checkpoints (all for riders own account) and resupply splits are provided so purists will view this as “semi-supported” but essentially it is still up to the rider when he/she stops and sources food, water, accommodation and/or camping.

Equipment

Bike Recommendations

We advise using mountain bikes with at least 2.0” tyres . Gravel bikes are permitted but please be warned that the riding is very technical and rough in sections and only extremely skilled riders should even contemplate gravel bikes.

There is no excessive bike carrying required so bike luggage is advised over loaded backpacks.

GPS Navigation

There are no route markings. Riders are required to carry their own GPS devices (and keep them charged) for navigation and must follow the designated route.

It must be noted that this event is not intended to replace any of the traditional Freedom Challenge events (where map and compass navigation is used) but rather offer a different kind of experience with different challenges, albeit on some of the same magical trails.

Weather Expectations

Late April is generally a good weather window but cold fronts can pass through the area this time of year. Temperatures can drop below freezing at night and rise to mid 30’s (Celsius) during the day. There are occasional afternoon storms this time of year and riders should be prepared for all eventualities.

Mandatory Equipment List

The following mandatory equipment must be carried by all riders for duration of the event. Random kit checks will be carried out and any rider not carrying mandatory gear item(s) will be immediately disqualified.

- Front and Rear lights x2
- Helmet
- Basic first aid kit - this includes bandages, antiseptic/sterile wipes, hydration salts, medication
- GPS (for Navigation)
- Mobile phone
- Satellite tracker (provided by race organizer)
- Waterproof jacket
- Thermal layer (top)
- Space blanket

Advised Equipment

- Riding Gloves
- Winter Gloves
- Thermal bottom layer
- Lightweight shell
- Waterproof bottoms
- Thermal socks
- Thermal headwear
- Bivvy / tent / sleeping system
- Dynamo hub and/or power bank
- Bike spares
- Water carrying system for minimum 3 litres
- Water purification tablets/drops
- Emergency food
- Extra space blanket or 2

Rider Safety

Personal Safety from Crime

South Africa is a developing country and infamous for its crime rate. Participants must be aware that personal safety should be a concern and you should take precautions so as to not put yourself at any additional risk. That said, we have barely had an incident worthy of reporting, whilst riding through this area in Freedom Challenge events since 2004. People in this area are generally very friendly and welcoming towards cyclists, particularly since the inception of the Freedom Challenge Scholarship Fund, an initiative that helps provide promising kids in the area with an improved education and head start for a better life. For more info on the FCSC visit: https://freedomtrailfoundation.org

We advise the following safety precautions for your consideration:

- Stay vigilant when approaching people or groups
- Communicate early to local people that you are friendly with a polite wave, smile and preferably a greeting in the local language: *"Dumela" ("Good day" in Sesotho)*
- If in any doubt, then cross the road or take as wide a birth as possible around bystanders
- Try to avoid stopping at rural taverns for water / re-supply
- Try avoid any prolonged interactions with inebriated people (often loitering around taverns)
- You may choose to carry pepper spray for self-defence but we recommend this only be used as a last resort if your personal safety is at risk
- Do not flash large sums of cash, electronics or jewellery when stopping in local villages
- Try find secluded places to camp / sleep off the road and out of site from passers-by
- Please be polite and courteous when asking advice or for water

Threat from Dogs

You will encounter dogs on the route and they can be a bit unwelcoming at times. If you are unable to confidently outride the dog then the best course of action is to stand your ground and shout loudly at the dog to go away. These rural dogs can be unfriendly but they are almost always submissive to your assertive commands.

It is advisable to get vaccinated for rabies if you take part in these sorts of events.

Snakes

There are around 25 types of snakes that live in the Southern Drakensberg Region and of those, only four are potentially dangerous. The Puff Adder, Berg Adder, Night Adder and the Rinkhals. Avoiding danger from these 4 snakes comes down to common sense and applying the rules of the bush.

Remember that these snakes live here and play a vital role in our ecosystem and will only try and bite you if they feel threatened. If you come across one of these four sakes, retreat slowly and quietly and remember that the Rinkhals can spit up to 3 metres. Do not try and chase it away, the consequences might be fatal. Generally snake bites are extremely rare in the Southern Drakensberg area, having said that, always be aware of the more dangerous species.

We advise doing some research on how to identify snakes in the Southern Drakensberg region and First Aid advice for snake bites.

Research portal: https://www.africansnakebiteinstitute.com

Vehicles

Even though this route is very much “off the beaten track”, vehicles are probably still your biggest threat. As cyclists you will likely be very aware of this threat by now but please be reminded:

- Ensure you have 2 forward facing lights and 2 rear red lights running off separate power sources
- Reflectors on bike, helmet and outer wear are also highly advised
- Lights to be on from 5pm till 7am at the minimum, preferably always when on vehicular roads
- Always ride on the extreme left hand side of road
- Never assume the driver of a motorised vehicle has seen you

Emergencies

All riders must be carrying a first aid kit and assist other riders with first aid should they require help. There is a race medic on the route but the course spans a large, often inaccessible area so first aid is essential. There is also a race doctor on call for telephonic consults and medical advice.

Race office will be on call 24/7 to receive calls regarding emergencies and get medic or assistance to you ASAP. If you have an emergency outside of mobile reception then the satellite tracker can be used to notify race office and/or medical response teams that you require help.

Emergency protocol will be discussed in more detail during race briefing.

Tracking

All riders are required to carry satellite trackers and ensure they are switched on and skyward facing for the duration of the ride. SPOT gen3 tracker rental (and batteries) is included with your entry fee. You are welcome to use your own connected Satellite Beacon Tracker (SPOT or Garmin inReach) and you will receive a R500 discount if you do (please insert detail on entry form).

Trackers will be issued at race briefing and operation and mounting instructions will also be communicated at briefing.

Scratching

If a rider scratches from the race then it is essentially their own responsibility to get themselves off the race course. Race office will assist with logistics where possible and when convenient and any cost involved will be for the scratched rider's account. Scratched riders may still finish the course I their own time.

Race Rules

You are expected to ride in the **spirit** of self-reliance, integrity and equal opportunity. Rules in an event such as this are to try and keep the 'playing field' as fair as possible but rules are largely self-policed so there is no point in cheating as you are mainly cheating yourself.

1. Riders must follow the **designated route** 100% and must sign in at all checkpoints. There is a tolerance of max 100m on the (less precise) cattle track network sections. Riders may leave the course for resupply/medical/mechanical/accommodation but must return to the exact point of departure from the route to recommence their ride. If a rider leaves the route due to navigation error they must return to the exact point of departure from the route to recommence their ride

2. **No 3rd party support,** private lodgings or resupply. All food and equipment must be carried from start or acquired at commercial services available to all riders. Rule of equal opportunity. Riders may receive assistance/spare parts/food/water from fellow riders. Riders may not see family, friends, personal supporters on the route.

3. Riders must carry all mandatory **equipment** items for the entire duration of the ride. Any equipment left at a checkpoint is considered a donation and may not be collected later.

4. **No personal arrangements** are allowed prior to start of event. Shipping supplies or equipment to points on the race course is not permitted. No pre-booking of accommodation and other services on the route until after the race has commenced. (this excludes bookings at start/finish venue which are permitted)

5. Riders must have at least two front facing **lights** and at least two red rear facing lights on their bikes and/or bodies. All lights to have independent power sources. At least one front and rear light must be on from 5pm - 7am.

6. Riders must wear bicycle **helmet** whilst cycling.

7. Riders must keep their mobile phone on and be reachable for the duration of event.

8. **No doping** (WADA Prohibited List 2020). Race organiser has the right to conduct random testing and if a rider tests positive they will be disqualified and banned from event for life.

9. This is essential a **solo self-supported race**. If you are aiming for a top 10 finish or top 3 category finish then you may not ride more than 50% of the route with the same person. You may choose to ride with partner(s) but there is no pairs/team category and you will not be eligible for overall/category podium finish if you do. There is no specific drafting restriction but it is not in the spirit of self-supported racing so please don't draft, particularly if you are racing competitively.

Enforcing the Rules:

The race director and/or race referee will be responsible for enforcing the rules at their discretion.

Rule infringements will result in:

- Warning
- Time penalty (added to finish time at end)
- Disqualification

Disqualified riders must leave the race immediately. Any appeals will be reviewed by panel of at least 3 referees and their majority decision will be final. Riders may continue to ride with consent from race director whilst decisions is under appeal.

Examples of infringements and respective outcomes for setting the standard:

- Missing mandatory gear item before start >>> May not start the race
- Losing mandatory gear item during event >>>2 hour time penalty (continue with RD's consent)
- Knowingly go off course and not returning to last known point on route >>>DQ
- Mistakenly go off course and return unknowingly>>>RD discretion, penalty of at least 3x any time saved
- Seeing a family member under pre-arrangement>>> DQ
- Accidentally seeing a friend on route>>> Warning and DQ is this "persists"
- Not signing in at CP (but tracker shows you in vicinity)>>> 1 hour time penalty
- Lights not on during specified times>>>1st infringement = warning, 2nd infringement = 3 hour time penalty, 3rd infringement = DQ
- Doping = DQ and lifetime ban
- Competitive riders suspected of riding together>>> warning to separate communicated and if not adhered then eligible for podium finish
- Reported misconduct, bad behaviour or rudeness on route>>> warning then DQ

In conclusion, we just want you to get out there and have your OWN adventure. If you do this in the spirit of the event then we guarantee a higher level of fulfilment and self-satisfaction.