

SA Cycling

Pope-Ellis returns to Dusi on wheels

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He has done it on the water over 40 times and now he is back again to do it by mountain bike. Fifteen times winner of the Dusi Canoe Marathon, Graeme Pope-Ellis, with partner Lloyd Darby, is taking on next weekend's Jonsson Dusi Mfula MTB Experience, pedalling from Pietermaritzburg to Durban through the Valley of a 1000 Hills.

Mountain biking is similar to canoeing and is good cross training during the paddling off-season. "The sport, and particularly the Dusi Mfula, takes you to spots people hardly ever get to see and is quicker than running and canoeing. I can see why this event is growing so fast," said the Pope.

A field of 700 riders will embark on the two-day adventure riding approximately 80km on the first day and 40 km on the second. The event attracts many riders from the corporate corridor. Interestingly there are 207 CEO's and 277 senior managers of companies in the field representing over 20 000 employees.

"It is more like a bosberaad, or lekgotla, of top business people than a mountain bike experience," said race director Ray de Vries.

Pope-Ellis joins fellow past Dusi winner Martin Dreyer, who has devoted his time to developing youngsters from the Valley to race the traditional Hansa Powerade Dusi.

"I am now living in the Valley and helping develop kids in the Change a Life programme. We have a few of our paddlers riding the event as part of the Dusi Mfula development initiative," said Dreyer.

"I am chuffed to see 'Pope' will be back again this year - it seems quite strange to see so many people enjoy what used to be the domain of the paddlers," he remarked.

Day one sees the riders start at Bishopstowe at 8am and, taking district roads and single track via Mission Rapid and Mfula Store, they work their way through to the overnight stop at Inanda Dam. On the second day riders start at 7am and follow the route which winds down the Valley over the famous Burma road portage - an eye opener to novices each year - and down to the Blue Lagoon and the finish on Sunday. Organiser De Vries reiterated the spirit of the event is for South Africans to experience the wonders of the Dusi Valley. "It is a very special place and I am super chuffed that riders are able to experience why it is so lekker to be a South African.

Whilst we have a few top riders, it is not a race, it is a great South African experience," he said.

