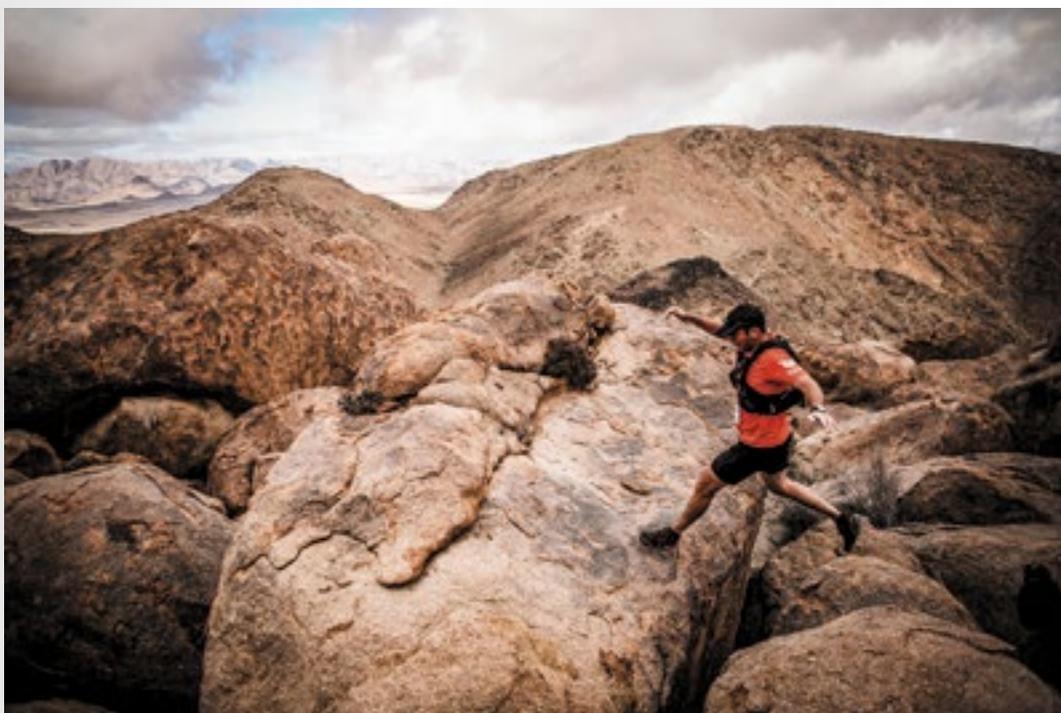




# RICHTERSVELD WILDRUN

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY IAN CORLESS



Placing one foot in front of the other as a method of transport takes us back to our roots, our basic instincts. The simple act of running. It's about being in the wild, surviving and fulfilling a primal need to cover ground in search of food and a place to sleep. The Richtersveld Wildrun certainly provides a backdrop for running as a wild adventure, harking back to our primal needs. It's possible to create a bond of being at one not only with nature but also with fellow competitors as stories and experiences are shared around campfires under incredible African skies each night. Traversing and covering this terrain on foot adds to the incredible experience. It provides a real and raw opportunity to be isolated; at one with the environment. It provides answers to the question of why we run.

The /Ai/Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park, between Namibia and South Africa, includes the oldest desert in the world and is home to an abundance of flora, wildlife, nomadic tribes, sulphur springs, archaeological sites, the stunning Tatasberg boulders and the iconic Fish River Canyon. No two days are the same in this remote wilderness; in addition to the ever-changing terrain, weather conditions offer a challenge. Hot days are followed by cool nights. It rarely rains here, maybe once or twice a year. But when it does, you need to be prepared: it's almost Biblical.

Weathered by water, rain and volcanic activity, the park is a geological masterpiece of natural sculptures – imagine running through a gallery of Moore or Blake's finest sculptures.

Few people have witnessed this remote place – and that's what makes it so special. The Richtersveld Wildrun is a low-key race. Intentionally so. The idea for a race in the park came about in 2006 when race director Owen Middleton visited the area for the first time. Working in conjunction with park manager Nick de Goede and Roland Vorwerk from Boundless South Africa, that dream became a reality in 2014.

Navigating via GPS over four days, participants cover 150km through the remote and isolated wilderness on a circular route that starts and finishes on the Orange River at Sendelingsdrif. Base camp each day is set up in advance for everyone to ensure that runners have maximum comfort in this remote environment and small individual tents are provided to ensure a good night's rest. It's a run through time, through millions of years of history in an ever-changing landscape that not only challenges the legs and lungs but also the eyes and mind.

Escape is a word used extensively when talking about running, it's a metaphor that encompasses so much; an escape from work, an escape from day-to-day life and so on. But do we ever really find that escape? Here in Africa, it is possible.

The word "race" conjures up an image of lean, toned athletes pushing each other to the max. For sure, racing goes on at the Richtersveld Wildrun – but not to slow down, look around and soak in and embrace the surroundings would be a very foolish race strategy. Think about this the next time you take part in a race. Remove the blinkers, kick back, enjoy the experience and you know what: you may well find that your racing experience is enhanced by the removal of performance pressure.

Think about why you run.  
I know I have.

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