

Wilder Lesotho Wildrun

Place a generous sprinkling of intrepid, enthusiastic trail runners, equipped with their warmest winter trail kit, in the highlands of Lesotho in April. Add exquisite single track routes over mountains, through valleys, across raging rivers and past wild waterfalls. Bake in cold temps for three days in the Wildrunner oven, and you have the Lesotho Wildrun. – BY LINDA DOKE

F For trail runners wanting a taste of travel and challenge, this event is perfect – it's a three-day, 120km mountain running journey through the magnificent Ketane Ha Mothibi and Thaba Putsoa ranges in the remote mountain kingdom of Lesotho. Only this year, the Lesotho Wild Run got wilder! A cold front moved in which meant maximum temperatures of about 12 degrees, rain and wind, making the course muddy and slippery, considerably slowing the pace, and changing the dynamics of the race, making it far tougher, but also a whole lot more dramatic, more beautiful, more real.

BEST LAID PLANS

My plan for each day was to start steady, maintain a consistent pace, and finish each stage strong. Most importantly, I needed to not get lost! The race is self-navigational – GPS waypoints are provided and runners need to choose their optimal routes between points.

Day 1: covered 43km with 2 080m vertical gain, topping us at 2 640m at the 32km mark. The trails were incredible, passing remote villages reachable only by horse and foot. Crossing the Ketane River,



LINDA FEELING THE FREEZE.

Images: Courtesy Wild Runner Events

said to be "knee-deep at worst," was an eye-opener – the river was chest-deep and the force of the current was strong. I slipped in a stream about three hours into the run and completely drenched my thermal. Within minutes I was shivering. Fortunately I had a dry thermal in a ziplock bag in my pack, so I literally stripped off my wet stuff, pulled on my dry thermal and my waterproof, and felt like a million bucks again.

Day 2 – 28km with 2 175m of climbing – was a stunner. The route circumnavigated the Maletsunyane River Gorge with an eye-level view of the 192m Maletsunyane Falls, the highest single-drop falls in southern Africa. Again, the single track was breathtaking, a mountain traverse trail that often meandered just metres away from 300m sheer drop-offs to the gorge below.

Day 3: 39km and snow! The air was cold, the ground crisp, and the beauty of the surrounding mountains draped in soft white snow took the burn from our legs and lungs as we pushed up the infamous Baboon's Pass at around 2 500m. The race finished with a river crossing and a sharp climb to the lavish green lawns of the Ramabanta Trading Post.



MEMORIES...

The Lesotho Wildrun is an incredible journey filled with rich experiences and intoxicating views into a world that time seems to have forgotten. For me, the most lingering visual memory is a quintessential Lesotho image, of a tall, statuesque Basotho shepherd high on a mountainside in the rain, wrapped in his traditional blanket and leaning on a staff as he watches over his grazing sheep. /A

The race was won by Jacques Mouton in 17:09. Linda finished first women and third overall in 17:50.