



Location, location...

Event situation holds the key to your adventure racing enjoyment

I'M NOT CRAZY about the wet and cold and my constitution doesn't hold up to rolling swell on the open ocean; this explains why you are unlikely to find me doing a race in a wintery Scotland and I hesitate to enter a local event on the Wild Coast if it features a large sea kayaking leg. Race location is an important participation decider as it sets the seasonal, climatic (temperature, humidity, weather condition – sun, wind, precipitation) and topographic (relief, terrain, vegetation) tone for the event. It also determines the disciplines included in the race.

To explore strange new worlds

Adventure races offer variety. Participants can experience festivities in rural villages, desolate desert crossings, rafting on raging glacier-fed rivers and trekking through pristine alpine parks. The variety of terrain, even within a race, is an attraction that keeps racers in the sport for years. Course director, race distance and format aside, based purely on location, no two races are ever alike.

Throw in some other challenges

Distance alone is a devil. Add technical navigation and dense vegetation to the standard mix of long stages, elevation gain (and loss), extreme temperatures (hot and cold) and altitude and you've got a bar-brawl of challenges. This affects the racing speeds of teams; that's why teams will cover 400km in three days at one race and in seven days at another.

Sign us up for snowboarding lessons

"We've done roller-blading in Portugal, slot canyoneering and river boarding in Utah, coastal paddling with a three-metre high swell in New Zealand and glacier crossings



You won't get many chances to race through protected terrain like Seychelles' famed Valee-de-Mai Nature Reserve, but adventure racing has allowed access to other areas to the lucky few

in Greenland," says Team Cyanosis' captain and navigator Nicholas Mulder.

An event's location and the season in which it is held opens a range of discipline possibilities. American and European races like to include roller blading or kick biking; some winter events incorporate snowboarding, skiing, snowshoeing or even ice climbing; and many seem fond of throwing wet-suit clad racers into near freezing rivers for adrenalin-rushed river boarding or tubing stages.

If the discipline is a difficult one to train in South Africa, like snow skiing, options include taking a crash-course in Lesotho or abroad and giving it a bash at the race; or not entering races that include skiing if one has neither the necessary skills nor the opportunity to gain proficiency. Most racers would probably select the latter option because traveling abroad to race is costly and it's bet-

ter to go over with well-rounded competence in all of the event's disciplines and a fighting chance of reaching the finish line.

So it's a BIG race...?

In 2010, Poland's Bergson Winter Challenge is hosting the Adventure Racing World Championships. This winter race includes snowy disciplines like snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. You're unlikely to find an SA team attending but you can be assured of seeing flags from Finland, Sweden, France and Spain.

"There are other races, like Bergson, that aren't high on my priority list," says Mulder. *"I prefer to do races in a temperate or sub-tropical environment rather than a tropical jungle – there were too many horror stories of weird infections and viruses from Eco Challenge Borneo. It would take a special circumstance, like World Champs, before I would seriously consider racing in such an environment. I might not be totally adverse to certain terrain types, but there are others I'd agree to race in much quicker."*

Desirability factors

As much as the appeal of multi-day races is the physical and mental challenges, adventure racing is fun and an adventurous way to see the World. The three most important factors that determine the desirability of a race are location, location and location. You can select races held in places that interest you, at a time of year that is suited to your temperature preferences and that includes disciplines in which you have reasonable competence.

□ Lisa de Speville

Adventure racing author, athlete and www.ar.co.za founder

