



PRETTY TO LOOK AT...  
...but tough to ride. The Rhodes  
Extreme lives up to its name.



## Remote Excitement

### THE RHODES EXTREME MOUNTAIN BIKE CHALLENGE, EASTERN CAPE

140km over two days

September each year

[www.rhodesextreme.co.za](http://www.rhodesextreme.co.za)

THIS EVENT USED TO BE CALLED THE RHODES CHALLENGE, and was one of the first ultra-distance events in South Africa. At 85km, it was double the length of anything out there, and with the monstrous climb up Naude's Nek, all the way to the Lesotho border, it had riders gasping like goldfish as the altimeters headed for 3 000m above sea level. And then, as if you weren't already in trouble, the road heads left along the border fence, past Tiffindell, to a long stretch called the Ben Macdhui Flats. For no good reason. The Ben Macdhui bit is valid – the nearby peak by that name is the highest in the Eastern Cape – but the flats bit is just plain false advertising, unless the accepted error in naming them was 30m. It is just one long succession of strength-sapping rolling hills. The reward is well worth it though: the scariest descent in Africa, a one-in-three concrete

### SURVIVAL TIP...

Take warm clothes with you on the ride – the temperature can plummet along the Lesotho border, and the weather can change incredibly quickly.

double-strip that feels near vertical mainly because it is, with a scary 120-degree corner half way down that threatens to pitch you into orbit if you get it wrong. If adrenalin is your vice, here be dragons.

The new incarnation of the Rhodes Challenge addresses the only real negative aspect of the old one: Rhodes has to be the most remote place in South Africa. It is 800km from Joburg, or a solid 14 hours from Cape Town, it always seemed to be a waste to have just one ride when you got

there. The new format is quite fun, with two- or three-man teams lining up to do a 40km singletrack ride and a 15km night race on the first day, and the original route on the second, as the final stage. Only 100 teams get to do the full event, but individuals can ride the final stage, which has been renamed The Grandfather.

**RIDE IT IF... you can climb! Naude's Nek is a long, hard ascent, and the rest of the ride is anything but flat.**

**Did you know?**

During the second Boer War, between June 1901 and February 1902, Rhodes was invaded 29 times!



## Stage Glory

### MTN PANORAMA TOUR, MPUMALANGA

330km in four days

End of April each year

[www.panoramatour.co.za](http://www.panoramatour.co.za)

A RELAXED STAGE RACE FOR THE ROAD RIDERS, THE Panorama Tour manages to combine sedate cycling through the hilly White River area with just enough racing to keep the fast guys and girls happy. Taking a leaf from the success of mountain bike stage racing, it is a two-person team event, starting with a hilly 115km on day one, exploring the roads out towards Sabie, including the brutal 15km climb to Spitskop. This one is not too steep, but relentless on the legs, which will scream at you until you crest it and scream back, at high speed back to White River. All four stages are based at the Casterbridge Shopping Centre, and Louis van der Merwe's priceless 1936 Jaguar SS100 leads out all the starts, adding a genteel touch to proceedings. Day two is as flat as you can get in the Lowveld, and at 80km short and fast, with gently rolling hills the order of the day before a nasty surprise or two in the last 20km. Day three is anything but flat, starting with Spitskop in reverse, followed by a steep 9km drag up Long Tom Pass, from Sabie. Don't forget to stop in Sabie, as you turn left onto the pass, for some decadent pancakes – you will burn them off in the next few kays. Mercifully, the left turn off the pass after 9km means you miss out on the other 15km or so the organisers could have thrown in to get you to the top of Long Tom, and the rest of the day's ride is fast and fun. The final day is a short, brutal (if you choose to make it so) time trial from Casterbridge. Still riding in teams of two, this is your chance to make up time on your rivals, or just simply see how strong three days in the Lowveld have made you. The timing of the Panorama Tour is perfect – after a hectic few months of bunch races and interval sessions and more, getting ready for the World Funride Championships in Cape Town, it is nice to prepare more gently for, and then ride a social event, and an event where you will actually see some scenery, not just the glutes in front of you.

### SURVIVAL TIP...

Red wine is not ideal for loading carbs for the final day's time trial, but the chances are the *geselligheid* at the Panorama Tour will make you want to drink it anyway!

**RIDE IT IF... you want a taste of stage racing, but with a social slant rather than a winner-takes-all atmosphere.**

**Did you know?**

The Long Tom Pass is named after a Boer War cannon, four of which were imported by the Transvaal Republic. All four were destroyed after they ran out of ammunition – the huge caliber of 155mm was not common. It had a range of 9km.