In our final trail running instalment, Stephen Cunliffe slips on his trainers and joins 79 other wildrunners for three unforgettable days, as they pound their way north along one of South Africa’s most enchanting stretches of coastline.
Welcome relief after the windswept beach. The sun and headwind were taking a heavy toll on weary legs by this stage and many competitors — myself included — had run out of water before we even hit the 40km mark. Dehydrated, utterly exhausted and suffering vicious cramps in my left hamstring, the Wildrun was letting me know in no uncertain terms who was in charge. A friendly runner pulled up alongside me and retrieved a couple of Rennies from her first aid kit; sucking the tablets helped alleviate my muscle spasms over the final few kilometres.

After five long hours of hard racing, a final sandblasted stretch of exposed beach took us to the Mhlathane River mouth and the biggest swim of the entire Wildrun. Diving into the muddy water our shattered legs enjoyed a brief reprieve from running. Barely 2km after the swim, the stage finish at Haven Hotel came into view. Upon arrival, I collapsed into the swimming pool along with my teammates, Duncan Gutsche and Mike Arbuthnot. Even for the weariest wildrunners, cooling aching leg muscles in a swimming pool while sipping cold beer was a sure-fire recipe for recovery.

Thankfully, it wasn’t all beach on stage two. After some food and a solid nights rest, I awoke to stiff joints and leaden legs. From the gates of Kob Inn, stage two set out across gently sloping grasslands crisscrossed by cattle tracks. Respite from the wind-ravaged beach was short-lived though. After just 3km, we found ourselves splashing through the first water hazard of the day at the Jujura River, re-emerging on the beach alongside a stormy sea.

I never thought I would utter the words ‘I hate the beach’ but, by midway through day two of the windiest Wildrun on record, I was cursing the gale-blasted beach for its often beautiful and unforgivingly brutal stretch. After all, while undergoing a physical and emotional rollercoaster along an incredibly emotional rollercoaster along an incredibly beautiful and unforgivingly brutal stretch of South African coastline, the true Wildrun experience is difficult to reduce to words. But it is the sharing of unique experiences with like-minded people, the friendships forged through adversity, and the overcoming of shared hardships that ultimately necessitate and define the Wild Coast Wildrun. The field of endorphins that comes from real physical accomplishment arrived within minutes and lasted late into the night. After some hard racing and seesawing at the top of every trail runner’s bucket list. Stephen Cunliffe would like to thank sponsor Adidas without whose generous support the Wild Coast Wildrun could not have taken place. Adidas also provided some top-quality technical trail running kit to competitors.

Planning to go wild?
The Wild Coast Wildrun is organised by the Wildrunner Event Company (www.wildrun.co.za) and takes place in mid-September each year. The Wildrun comprises two events: the more social Journey, followed a week later by the Race. The field is limited to a maximum of 80 entrants per event due to logistical challenges and accommodation restrictions. For up-to-date information concerning the 2014 event, check out www.wildrun.co.za or get in touch with registration manager, Tamaryn Jupp, at info@wildrun.co.za.