

# TO THE LOWVELD

## UP THE BERG AND THROUGH THE BUSH

Like a true MTB pro (and part gypsy) **Erik Kleinhans** traversed the country and took on some of his favourite rides as well as a new race partner.

**t**raveling is part of the game if you ride bikes for a living. It can get a little too much every now and again especially after a very long season, but there is no way I will miss the fun and exciting races at the end of the SA racing season.

Over the last few years a little Lowveld mission was always on the cards for two of my favourite events, the York Timbers Pro/Am Enduro and the Isuzu 3-Towers. This year I also threw in the much talked about Grindrod Berg&Bush stage race on the border between the Free State and Kwazulu-Natal on my cross training trip :)

The York Enduro is a special event now in its fourth year and I was fortunate enough to take part in three of

them. The concept is simple, with twenty professional riders being teamed up with twenty corporate teams of four to take part in an enduro style concept with fifteen timed stages over three days. There is also the additional downhill, XCO and eliminator races to spice things up for some spectating.

But it is definitely not about the racing. It is about riding your bike. Everyone at the event is just simply passionate about mountain biking, riding some of the best trails you can find, being outside, laugh at some banter, learn from the pro's, learn from the corporates, braai, give away Qhubeka bikes and dance to the beat of the legend Kurt Darren!

After a few years spending

slightly more time in the sunshine, I got teamed up with one of the fastest teams on the course. It was a pleasure riding with Supercycling presenter Andrew McClean, Absa CEO Arrie Rautenbach, Tulbagh farmer Deon Wilkins and road cyclist Elmarie de Wet. We talked fruit farming, business, some cycling and one thing is for sure that we all loved the experience and believe there is a big future for events like this! Thanks Piet van Zyl and everyone at York Timbers for investing in mountain biking!

The fun and games did not end there, but the pace sure as hell warmed up a lot over the next two weekends! I teamed up with friendly giant and former motocross racer, Matt Beers for the following two races. What



**ABOVE:** Erik powering through the dry and dusty Winterton bushveld

**BELOW LEFT:** The team from sponsors, York Timbers, get to celebrate with legend Karl Platt of Team Bulls fame.

a genuine good guy and we formed a great partnership even though apart from racing, we never even did a training ride in the same bunch.

3-Towers and Berg&Bush are very similar races with proper trails, rough routes in the middle of the bush and you just feel great being out there! Both of them look after the riders so well and it must be some of the best relaxing environments you can experience in an event in South Africa.

In both races Matt and I had a big dice against the NAD team of Nico Bell and Gawie Combrinck. Both events however had a really strong field, especially Berg&Bush with the XCO bullets joining the party and really animated the stages.

We started both events on a positive footing winning the first stage, but at 3-Towers

the local NAD boys were serious to win their home stage race and they did that by hurting us on the long climbs of the second day to get the overall title. Matt and I returned the favour at Berg&Bush however, more suited to the technical terrain and punchy climbs to claim the overall title in what must have been one of my most rewarding victories. Team Telkom and Scott LCB also won stages along the way.

Apart from the racing, I love the good spirit between the mountain bike racing teams. Matt and I had a blast exploring Pretoria with Johan Rabie and HB Kruger from Team Telkom and stayed with Nico for the week during 3-Towers. We celebrated our podium... okay... and their win together with a Lowveld braai! It is a highlight of my life to be part of such a great industry! **fs**



**Erik Kleinhans** has joined the specialist marathon racing team of **Topeak Ergon**, but that doesn't mean you'll be hearing any less from the **Lion King**. Follow him on Twitter: **@erikkleinhans**, or visit **www.topeak-ergon-racing.com**.

