



The Lion King is currently hard at work with his Topeak Ergon Team and in his latest column he gives us some insight into their preparation in the run-up to the Epic.

BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS UNDER THE AFRICAN SUN

LEFT: Erik Kleinhans shredding some trails during his Epic training. BELOW: Team Topeak Ergon enjoying some long hours in saddle.

I am still amazed how fortunate we are to have the Cape Epic in our backyard, think about it, the biggest mountain bike stage race in the world taking place right under our noses! And through the years it has become so difficult and important to win, we see more and more riders visiting mtb-friendly destinations like Stellenbosch to prepare.

My Topeak Ergon Team was not going to miss out this year, they made the trip to SA before for a training camp before the event in 2014, but after two years training in other destinations and in colder European climates, it was decided that it has become crucial to get used to the Western Cape terrain, routes and climate to really give winning the Cape Epic your best shot, just like many other riders/teams such as Bulls, Specialized and Scott.

Like last year, our team setup for the 2017 edition of the Cape Epic will be the same in the men's category with Alban Lakata (Austria) and Kristian Hynek (Czech) our brothers leading the charge with the target on their backs to bring the victory home! Jeremiah Bishop (USA) and

myself will again be their support team. Sadly Sally Bigham will not contest the ladies category this year for not finding a suitable racing partner.

Kristian even committed for a three-month stay in Stellenbosch bringing his wife and two boys with for two of those. It is for sure great to have him around as a training partner in the weeks of hard work leading up to our biggest goal of the year. Alban and Jeremiah joined us for a three-week training block which included some racing, the Grabouw National Marathon, the Fairtree Simonsberg Contour and ending it off with a mini dress-rehearsal at the Momentum Tankwa Trek.

In between the racing, the sunshine was for sure a welcome change for all three my team members from the northern hemisphere, and also the opportunity to ride on some of the routes of the upcoming Cape Epic. Obviously quite a lot of the route is on private land which is not accessible to us unless you know the owners of the land which is mostly not the case, but the bike-parks are all within limits and all you need to do is pay for the relevant permits.

Personally, even as a Saffa and living in the middle of Cape Epic territory, it is for sure nice to ride on certain sections of the route, it just gives you the idea of the area, the structure of the earth and somehow when you come back and race there again, it doesn't feel like the moon with everything being strange.

Other than the riding, it is really special to have all the boys together for some training! Each of us got a slightly different personality and for sure that makes for lots of fun and entertaining times. Alban is the slightly more calculated and serious one, always thinking about ways to improve bikes, equipment, training techniques and have a sharp, dry sense of humour. Kristian is the laid-back one that looks like he always sleeps fifteen hours of the day, but actually is always busy with family or his importing business in Czech Republic. Nothing seems to bother him and he just smiles and enjoy life. Jeremiah, or JB, is the busy one, a real American who loves to talk, strategize, make jokes, rule social media, for sure keeping us on our toes and

maybe a little bit messy in the camper!

It has become so difficult to win the Cape Epic, something that Kristian was fortunate enough to win on his first attempt, but after many podium positions, it is still that one short from Alban's impressive palmares, and it is clear now that without doing your homework, visiting ground zero and preparing all aspects to be ready for this eight-day race, you will need a lot more luck to stand on the top step of the podium.

Over the last months, Stellenbosch has been pro-

rider mecca. Next year most likely even more so with the UCI World Cup round also moving to Stellenbosch the weekend before the Cape Epic, the same weekend as the CT Cycle Tour. It is a great opportunity for us all to be right in the middle of what will be cycling mayhem!

Thank you to all the trail builders, event organisers, bike-shops and everyone involved for creating all these amazing opportunities for us! Now we just need to make the roads safer, get cars off the road and people commuting on fixies and e-bikes! **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.



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