

Back To The Berg: Expedition Africa Returns To The Drakensberg

After a one-year sabbatical Expedition Africa makes a highly anticipated return to the Adventure Racing World Series with its "Back to the Berg" event.

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After a one-year sabbatical, the iconic Expedition Africa adventure race is making a highly anticipated return to the Adventure Racing World Series (ARWS) with its "Back to the Berg" event. Scheduled for 13–23 March 2026, this multi-day, non-stop expedition will once again be an ARWS

World Championship Qualifier, drawing athletes from around the globe to the Alpine Heath Resort in South Africa.



Expedition Africa Returns to the Drakensberg

“

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Heidi Muller. CEO ARWS

A New Era for an Iconic Race

The Race Directors and organisers for the upcoming race are Damon de Boor and Franco Olivier. Both are competitive adventure racers (and teammates) and have organised shorter races under the Expedition Africa banner for some years. Now they step up to organise their first expedition race and continue the tradition of one of the best known races in the Adventure Racing World Series.

The race was started by Stephan and Heidi Muller in 2011 and continued with expedition races held all around South Africa, including in the Drakensberg in 2013. Races were also held in Eswatini, Lesotho and Rodrigues, and the event hosted the 2023 Adventure Racing World Championship in Kouga, attracting 109 teams from 36 countries.

By 2024 the Mullers had relocated to Australia and Heidi had taken on the demanding role of ARWS CEO. The pair returned to stage one last Expedition Africa race in Namibia that year, and the new owners then took on the ownership and leadership of this much loved race.

At the time Olivier commented, "Owning Expedition Africa is a dream come true. It's where passion and work come together to create true happiness. This is more than just a job; it's a calling."

Heidi Muller will be watching the race and live tracking from Australia this time, along with dot-watchers worldwide, and said, "Expedition Africa is dear to my heart and a big part of my life, and my family's, so it's wonderful to see the race return. I know Damon and Franco have the same passion for adventure racing I do, and I can't wait to see the course they come up with. I know teams will have an incredible experience with them in the Drakensberg."

The Drakensberg Challenge

The 2026 race will take competitors deep into the Drakensberg mountains, a UNESCO World Heritage site including the highest mountain range in South Africa.

The region's name translates to 'dragon mountain' in Afrikaans, as early Dutch settlers believed the jagged peaks resembled the scaly spine of a dragon. To the local Zulu people, it is known as 'uKhahlamba',



Mountain Bike at Expedition Africa



Climbing will feature at Expedition Africa



Expedition Africa in the Drakensberg

meaning 'barrier of spears', perfectly describing the sharp, imposing pinnacles of the mountains.

Racers will face a grueling 500-kilometre course that showcases the region's incredible ecological diversity, historical sites, summits and waterways. They will not know the detailed route until the race briefing the day before the start, but do know there will be 8 stages and an imposing 14000m of climbing.

The teams will be tested across multiple disciplines, including mountain biking, trekking, kayaking, and on a ropework section that has been trailed as a race highlight. This will take teams up the Dragon Trail 'via ferrata', a nerve tingling 400m roped ascent up a buttress near the famous Tugela Falls. The falls drop over 950m in 5 tiers down the almost sheer cliffs from the Drakensberg plateau and are sometimes cited as the world's highest.

As this is a true wilderness expedition, GPS devices are not prohibited and teams will use map and compass to navigate their route between race checkpoints. The forecast is for mild weather, but the Drakensberg is famed for changeable conditions and temperatures at high elevations could be cold. Cloudy and foggy overnight conditions famously foxed the world's best adventure race navigators in 2013 and that may be a history 2026 teams should learn from.

The fastest teams are expected to cross the finish line in approximately four days, while others will have up to six days to complete the monumental journey.

An International Line Up of Teams

The race has attracted 25 teams from around the world and there are racers from 15 different nationalities. It's a feature of the line up that many teams include racers from 2 or 3 different nationalities.

The Aden Gear team has two racers from Brazil, one from the USA and one from Italy and they've never raced as a team together before, or even met in person! Their American team captain said, "Team Aden Gear is most excited about exploring the beauty of the Drakensberg Mountains and seeing what route choices and adventures the new race directors have set up for the event."

Team Trufflehunters is one of the highest ranking African teams, but that's de Boor and Olivier's



Expedition Africa will take teams into the Drakensberg Mountains

team so this time Trufflehunters will have two UK racers, one from the Netherlands and only one from South Africa. A second Trufflehunters team is from the UK, Ireland, Spain and South Africa!

The highest ranked team, and perhaps race favourites are Team Gym City of Poland (with one Irish racer). They are world ranked #22 and have been on the podium of ARWS Qualifier races 4 times, with one win at Rajd Beskidy in 2024.

The winning team will be offered a free place at this year's Adventure Racing World Championship and, as that race is now full, a Qualifier win is the only way onto the start line in Corsica.

Follow the Adventure

The race will have extensive media coverage from an expert team of videographers, photographers and reporters who all have experience of working on past Expedition Africa races, including the 2023 World Championship.

For more information and to follow the action live during the event follow the @expafrica and @arworldseries social media pages.

Expedition Africa Official Website: www.expafrika.net/EA2026

Live Tracking: <https://ea26.mapprogress.com/>

Adventure Racing World Series (ARWS): www.arworldseries.com

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