Updated October 2026



Preparing for the

RACE ACROSS SOUTH AFRICA

The Journey Ahead

“There is no single right way to do it — only your way.”

There is no single right way to prepare for this race. Each rider brings different strengths, goals, and gear —what works for some doesn’t work for all so make sure you test, trial, adjust and test some more.

Preparation, resilience, and attitude are your real tools out there. This manual will help you plan, but it’s your spirit that will make it happen.

Plans will change, things won’t always go as expected and it’s your willingness to adapt, that will carry you to the finish.

Use this guide as a framework, seek wisdom from those who’ve got more experience than you, and get ready for the adventure of a lifetime.

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Race Format

It is important to understand the basics of how things work in Race Across South Africa.

As a preamble, we would just like to reiterate that RASA is different event to FREEDOM CHALLENGE. Different format, different route, different rules.

Please do not bring any assumptions into RASA from previous Freedom Events that you may have completed. Try look at RASA through a COMPLETELY new lens.

<u>Here are a few key points to understand:</u>

- This is a “self-supported” race. You are expected to ride in the spirit of self-reliance, integrity and equal opportunity. ‘Equal opportunity’ means that only services/ accommodation/resupplies available, without prejudice, to all competitors are permitted.

- You are not always guaranteed of finding accommodation for the night and riders must be prepared to sleep out if they can’t make it to an accommodation spot or if the accommodation is already full.

- You must familiarise yourself with the latest race rules.

- The race is essentially **non-stop**. Once you start, the clock only stops when you cross the finish-line.

- It is a mass start (entire field at once).

- It is a solo event but you can ride with friend or group of friends if you wish. There are no specific rules against drafting.

- Riders must carry everything they require including mandatory equipment.

- Riders may not receive any personal support/seconding/visits whilst in competition.

- You must **follow the prescribed route** as per the latest official GPX file with suffix RASA(*year*)_final.

- The route is not marked, riders must navigate themselves using your own GPS.

- There are 3 compulsory checkpoints at which food and beds/mattresses are available. Apart from those three checkpoints riders are required to be fully self

supported and find their own accommodation or camp along the way.

- Riders will be provided with a full re-supply split sheet showing potential options for accommodation and food re-supply.

- All riders will carry satellite trackers for live tracking and emergencies. You can bring your own SPOT or Garmin inReach device or rent a SPOT gen 3 from organisers.

- Riders are expected to always conduct themselves in a sportsmanlike manner both towards fellow riders and hosts along the way. Please be considerate of your hosts facilities. Always put your rubbish in the bins. No chamois cream on beds or furniture, keep muddy shoes/gear outside. Always turn off heaters, electric blankets before departure. Remember to pay for all services and please just be extra polite and courteous towards all hosts on the trail so that they continue to host riders in future.

- The route traverses some of the most beautiful parts of the country, rich in heritage and we advise that you treat it like an expedition of exploration and adventure. Having the right attitude and maintaining your composure during the trying times will help you overcome the inevitable setbacks and keep you moving forward.



Packing Lists

Adequate preparation and the right gear can save your race, and maybe even your life.

The temperates can drop below zero. Even if you are not planning on sleeping out you need to be prepared to. Injury, navigation, weather can all affect your strategy and cause you to need to sleep out in cold conditions, it is your responsibility to be prepared for all eventualities. Rider safety is the primary goal. **Preparation and the right gear can save your life**.

Use the checklists below to make sure you are familiar with the compulsory gear, are adequately prepared.

The route mostly traverses remote countryside but does go through small towns where resupply options are available.

Even if you are planning to team up with another rider, you still need to carry all your own equipment (clothing, GPS, spares, meds etc.) as there are no guarantees that both of you will stay together for the duration of the event and in the event of your riding partner (or you) being forced to withdraw, the other rider must still be able to continue on their own.

Mandatory kit items:

- Mobile phone
- Helmet
- Bike light (front)
- Red light (back)
- Head-lamp
- Waterproof jacket
- *First aid kit
- **Emergency bivvy (minimum)

*First Aid Kit - At minimum riders must carry: Bandage, gauze, antiseptic, plasters, steri-strips, hydration salts, Aspirin. See full recommended list below.

**Emergency Bivvy is defined as a waterproof *Mylar* or aluminium coated tube sac that you climb into. Please note that a space blanket does not suffice. If you are carrying a more heavy duty bivvy/tent/sleep system then you don't have to also carry an emergency bivvy but we always recommend taking one also as it is so light and small and can save your life. Emergency bivvy's and RADBAG's are available form the Freedom online store: https://www.freedomchallenge.org.za/gear

Random kit inspections can take place at any point during the event, at the start or at the finish to ensure all riders are carrying the compulsory items.

Missing items will result in a warning, a time penalty or disqualification.

Recommended first aid kit

- Gauze
- Strapping
- Bandage
- Plasters
- Hydration salts
- Steri-strips
- Aspirin (Disprin)
- Anti-nausea (Valoid)
- Anti-histamine (cream and tabs)
- Anti-septic (Bactroban/Dettol)
- Friars Balsam and/or Methiolate Gauze
- Pain killers (e.g. Panado/ Stilpain/Tramadol)

Prescription Meds (please consult your GP)

- COX2 Anti-inflamatories (Adco Etoricoxib 90mg x 10) (NOT Cataflam)
- General antibiotic (Augmentin 1000mg - full 7 day course)
- General antibiotic (Zithromax 500mg - full 3 day course)
- Bacterial infection antibiotic (Kentrexil x 20)
- Cortisone (Prednisone x 50)

Clothes and personal items

- Cycling clothes
- Cycling gloves
- Cycling shoes
- Base layer top
- Base layer bottoms (Leg Warmers or Long tights)
- Head warmer (Beanie or Balaclava or Buff)
- Light Fleece
- Light Shell
- Spare socks
- Waterproof pants
- 'Off the bike' clothes
- Warm Insulated Gloves (waterproof)
- Arm warmers
- Emergency food/dehydrated meal
- Water purification tabs/drops
- Hydration bladder/water bottles
- Toiletries
- Lip-ice
- Sun cream
- Anti-chafe
- Personal meds/contact lenses etc
- Chargers
- Spare batteries
- Cash
- Credit Card
- ID
- Trail food

Bike Spares and tools

- Chain lube (and rag)
- Pump/CO2 canisters & inflator
- Shock pump
- Multi tool
- Spare spokes
- Duct tape
- Cable ties
- Leatherman (mini)

• Spare tyre (optional), tubes, sealant
• Brake pads (x3 sets)
• Plugs/patches/tyre gaiters
• Gear cable
• Chain links
• Spare derailleur hanger - NB
• Spare valve
• Freewheel hub spares (pawls + springs)
• Spare bolts, cleats etc.
• Brake fluid

It is **<u>your responsibility</u>** as a rider to take care of your own personal, medical and technical issues during the event. You should go into the event as self-sufficient as possible.



Time Penalties

Race rules are the same of all RASA riders whether you are racing for the win or chasing cut-offs. The only way to keep it clear to all is to apply them equally and without prejudice to all competitors.

If a rider breaks a rule they will be disqualified or given a time penalty. All time penalties must be served at the top of Bainskloof Pass (18km from the finish). The rider's tracker must record no movement for the duration of the penalty. If a rider elects to not serve his/her penalty then the time penalty will be tripled (x3) and added to his/her finish time.

<u>Rule no. 3</u>
No 3rd party support. Friends and family may NOT come see you during the event and may NOT leave anything for you along the route unless PRIOR consent is obtained from Race Office and the rider has communicated (with Race Office) that he/she accepts the associated time penalty for outside assistance. If no prior consent is obtained then penalties will be at least twice as long or even disqualification in extremely deviant circumstances. All food and equipment must be carried from start or acquired at commercial services available to all riders. Riders may receive assistance/spare parts/food/water from fellow riders.

Time penalties are issued by the Race Director. The standard time penalty for outside assistance will be 3 hours. If no prior consent from Race office is obtained the time penalty for outside assistance will be at least 6 hours (refer rule no.3).

The race director will be responsible for enforcing the rules at their discretion. Any penalties/disqualifications may be appealed in writing within 72 hours of race finish and will be adjudicated by referee panel.



Check-Points (CP's)

There are 3 compulsory check-points at which food and beds/mattresses are available. CP's also serve as interim cut-offs.

Riders need to reach the following checkpoints within the following cut-off's to remain within the race.

- CP1 300km 3 days
- CP2 630km 7 days
- CP3 1080km 10 days
- Finish 1950km 15 days

"1 day" is regarded as 24 hours so if the race starts at 8am on a Monday then "3 days" is 8am on Thursday.

Riders must stamp their Brevet Card at checkpoints.

There is food, beds and showers available at no additional cost to riders at the CP's.

Beds will be limited when large groups pass through CP's but there will be additional mattresses provided (with bedding) to ensure everyone has a spot to sleep if they so choose.

Food will be simple meals depending on time of day you pass through.
Afternoon/evening meals include pastas, stews, veggies, salad, potatoes.
Morning meals include porridge, cereals, eggs, fruit.

If you sleep at CP then you can eat in the evening and morning.

Tea, Coffee, Rusks, Juice, Coca-cola, water.

There will always be bread with peanut butter and/or jam available for self service sandwiches.

There is power available for charging batteries at CP's with two and three prong South African plug points and USB adapters.

There will be hand-washing powder and tubs available for self-service laundry at CP's.



Race Strategy: Race, Ride or Tour

Plan and prep but also know that anything is possible out there and be prepared to adapt.

Your main aim in RASA should be to get to the finish before the 15-day cut off - that in itself is a worthy achievement.

Aiming for a faster finishing time is entirely possible but immediately puts additional pressure on you. It is wise to decide on a strategy beforehand because it will affect your planning and expectations.

The cut-offs are fairly challenging to meet and riders must expect to be riding for 12-18 hours per day.

We expect a winning time of 7-8 days. Average riders pushing fairly hard should manage 10-12 days and most riders who have done their prep and are prepared to put themselves through some discomfort and long days in the saddle should be able to make the cut-offs.



Bike Choice

The best bike for the job is probably the one you already own.

Any and all self-powered bikes are permitted in RASA. No e-bikes permitted.

There will be a separate recognised category for single speed records in RASA for which the entire race must be ridden with the same gear ratio.

Whether you choose to go hardtail, full suspension, fully rigid or gravel bike is entirely up to you and your riding preference.

Feedback from 2026 event was that MTB would be preferential for most. Only the very hardened and fast gravel bike riders said they would choose a gravel bike next time. Almost all “average” riders that rode gravel bikes said they would opt for MTB next time.

The route is approximately:

70% decent gravel roads where gravel bike would be highly appropriate. These are well established roads but they are mostly very remote with little vehicular traffic.
20% rough gravel tracks where m would probably be better.
5% jeep track or single track where gravel bike riders will struggle.
5% tar.

Some points to consider:

- lightweight is good but strength and reliability are important.
- dependable components, avoid lightweight or difficult to service parts.
- strong tubeless tyres are very important.
- choose grips, saddle and pedals for all day comfort (use them in training).
- space for bottle cages on frame.
- start the event with a close-to-new drivetrain and a fully serviced bike
- bike fit is critical, a comfortable riding position will lead to less fatigue and a more enjoyable ride.

Something to bear in mind is that you won't be hammering the bike and giving it to someone else to fix afterwards – you will need to take care of your own bike and equipment. It's good to get into the habit of checking your bike after each day – a quick clean and lube of the drivetrain and an additional check to see that nothing has worked loose or been damaged – this is essential and will help you avoid major mechanical issues later on.



Medical

You need to look after yourself and prevent issues as far as possible while pushing your limits out on the trail.

Minor injuries and illness will be common. Being prepared for them will limit their potential impact on your ride. **Prevention** being the name of the game!

After years of managing Freedom Challenge we have established what the most common medical issues are and the full "Recommended First Aid List" covers most of the 'normal' things we see. Please feel free to expand on that list if you see fit.

Race office will not assist with getting you medications for illness. We will only assist with co-ordinating emergency evacuations where required.

Injuries/wounds

Overuse injuries to muscles and joints tend to creep in after a few long, hard days. Strength and mobility training for core, hips, knees, ankles, shoulders and back can counter this. Carry strapping tape and bandages for support. Anti-inflammatories and pain-killers may become necessary but use them wisely - and only use the COX2 inhibiter type anti-inflammatories. DO NOT USE BRUFEN or MYPRODEL whist taking part in endurance sport! In the event of a crash or fall, you may need to dress an open wound – gauze, disinfectant cream/wipes, plasters or bandages may all be required.

Saddle sores are also common, largely due to the long hours in the saddle and the extra weight of a backpack – prevention is best with long rides in training for conditioning and the use of an anti-chafe cream. An aesthetic cream (e.g. Anethaine) can help manage discomfort. Friars Balsam and/or Methiolate are your best options for treatment of sores.

Illness

Cold, dry and dusty air increase the chances of throat, chest and lung infections. If you get sick, please reach out to your GP asap, early intervention is key.

Stomach issues are also common due to the run down state one's body gets into on an expedition like RASA. Rehydration is important if you have stomach issues.

The route takes you through remote areas away from towns and cities so you cannot rely on purchasing anything very specific along the way.

If you are affected by injury or illness during your ride, you need to manage it and the decision to continue is in your hands. Be realistic about your condition and your chances for recovery.



Trackers

Your tracker is a reliable lifeline to the outside world. Please respect it and ensure that it is always on and tracking!

Please note that Satellite tracker is different to your GPS used for navigation

If you are using your own satellite tracker (Garmin inReach or SPOT) then it is your responsibility know how to use it and keep it charged and switched on.

The following is relevant to those renting a SPOT Gen 3 unit from Race Office.

The tracker will be given to you switched ON, please do not turn it off.

A tracker that is tracking well will have a green flashing lights on the top portion over the power and GPS icons as well as over the boot button, centre.

If you need to **reboot your tracker:**

1. Press and hold the "**power" button** top left for 3-4 seconds (lights will all flash on)
2. Press and hold the "**boot" button** centre for 3-4 seconds (light above boot comes on)

If you only press the "power" button then the tracker is on but not tracking your location. It is important to press the boot button after the power button.
You will be given a spare set of lithium batteries to carry with you. These are only to be used for your tracker and please not to be mixed with batteries you may be carrying for other devices.

The tracker needs to be securely attached to the shoulder strap of your back pack or top of a saddle bag or on the handlebars. It needs to be upward facing - **"SPOT" needs to be sky facing**.

There are one way communication options on your tracker. These are vital uses of communication when you are out of cell phone signal.

If you have cell signal please always call or message first, before pressing an emergency button on your tracker.

To press any button on the tracker press and hold until a green light comes on next to the button. ONLY PRESS ONCE. Then leave tracker outside and skyward facing. It will continually send us emergency messages every 5 minutes until we get there. Please do not press a second time as this cancels the emergency call.

The **"helping hand"** button:



Press this button if you do not have cell phone signal and you are too injured to continue. It is not a matter of "life and death" but you still require evacuation due to injury. e.g. a broken wrist.

The **"SOS"** button:



This button is used in **life and death situations** only. e.g. a possible heart attack or dangerous snake bite. Race office will co-ordinate the quickest evacuation possible with paramedics involved. Please try and follow this up with a phone call. The more information we have about the situation the better our response can be.

The “**OK”** button:	Sends us a message to tell us you are OK. Please press this button to confirm any cancelled emergency calls. (See below)

If you press any of the above emergency buttons (helping hand or SOS) by accident you can de-activate them by pressing and holding them again for 3-4 seconds until the light next to them changes to red. This will send race office a cancel message. Please follow this up with pressing the OK button so that it is confirmed that you are alright.

Your tracker is a reliable lifeline to the outside world. Please respect it and ensure that it is always on and tracking!



Freedom Challenge Scholarship Fund

Your preparation for RASA wouldn't be complete without introducing you to the incredible Freedom Challenge Scholarship Fund (FCSF).

In 2010 Sean Woolnough was the guardian of a group of riders doing the Ride to Rhodes - the precursor to The Race to Rhodes. After their stay at Vuvu there was a discussion among his batch of riders about what they could do to help the school. The initial idea was to get them a television. This idea was fed back to David Waddilove the founder and then race director of the Freedom Challenge. David felt that the provision of a television for the school fell within the ambit of the education department and instead mooted the idea of starting a scholarship fund where pupils along the Maluti portion of the Ride to Rhodes route could be funded to attend the boarding school located at Mariazell Mission School which is located at the foot of the ridge below the check-point (CP1) at Malekhalonyane. This idea fit firmly into one of David's founding principles - supporting communities along the route.

Nikki McLeod, located near Matatiele, and involved in community developmental projects in the region together with the Mehloding Trust took up the challenge of getting the programme off the ground. Initially the fund fell under the auspices of an established foundation. Apart from charging admin fees the foundation added nothing to the initiative. With that in mind the Freedom Trail Foundation was established as its own Nonprofit Organisation.



From that point forward the administration of the Foundation has been done on a zero fee basis. The net effect being that every cent raised goes to funding students. Direct deposits into the Foundations account strips away the overhead costs associated with the various fund raising apps.

Allen Sharp has been at the helm of the administration since scholars have been attending Mariazell starting 2011. The ground work is done by Tsepo Lesholu who is remunerated by Chris and Julia. Apart from the work Tsepo does in keeping the relationship going between the race and the local communities he shoulders the responsibility of interacting with the chiefs, school principals and teachers, Mariazell, parents/guardians and the students. The combined efforts of Allen and Tsepo is the glue that keeps it all together and the oil that makes it run smoothly.

The Race administrators who have followed David; Glenn and Meryl, and now Chris and Julia; have been steadfast supporters of the Fund.

So far the Fund has sponsored 72 scholars, representing 213 scholar years. Initially the sponsorship was for the final 3 years of high school but has since opted to admit students for 5 years. This gives the students a better chance of academic success. Over the last few years a number of students have gone on to study at university. It's

worth mentioning that attending university, while a fair measure of academic achievement, is not the only goal. If students are able to go on and find employment or establish their own small businesses then those are equally acceptable outcomes. The school at Mariazell, while a zero fee government school, is run under the auspices of the church established at the mission. Apart from a good education students are exposed to discipline and respect.

The funding of the FCSF has been done entirely by the ongoing support of riders and supporters of the various Freedom Challenge events. The generosity of this cohort is extraordinary. Year after year all it takes is the flimsiest excuse to spur them on to supporting the fund.

If you are wanting to ride for a good cause and raise funds through your efforts then please consider supporting the Freedom Challenge Scholarship Fund.

As you cross South Africa you are going to be moved and touched and perhaps even inspired by the cultural journey you will be on. If riding the RASA touches you in a special way and if it inspires you choose to live life in a different way.,don't hold back in giving back to the beautiful South Africa that opened it's heart to you.

BANKING DETAILS
Freedom Trail Foundation
First National Bank or FNB South Africa
Account Number: 62473449356
Reference: your name
Branch: Cresta
Branch Code: 250655
Swift code: FIRNZAJJ or FIRNZAJJXXX if your bank requires an 11-digit code

Thank you for choosing RASA,
and with it the wild unknown.
With all the unpredictabilities on the Freedom Trail,
one thing is certain;
Adventure is guaranteed.

