



SEAN FRAENKEL

OCCUPATION: Commercial diver

HOME TOWN: Cape Town

Babu & Bongki go bos

Wannabe adventure man **Sean Fraenkel** hitched his home-made trailer to his mountain bike, loaded up his Jack Russells and set off along the R332 through the Baviaanskloof.



▲ **DOGS IN TRANSIT.** Pooped pooch Tequila packed it in after the first 15 km and opted to ride in the trailer (despite Turbo's attempts to get him out).

In 2010 I climbed Kilimanjaro with my uncle, Bruce Davis. Our porters gave Bruce the nickname Babu and called me Bongki, meaning "Grandfather" and "Fatboy", respectively. (I prefer to think of myself as horizontally challenged.)

Anyway, the names stuck, and whenever we need a shot of nostalgia to remind ourselves of Kili's high altitudes and awesome views, we call each other by our Swahili nicknames.

Once the Kili euphoria had faded, it was time for another adventure. I started planning a 10-day unassisted cycle through the North West. I imagined myself as a poor man's Riaan Manser. It would be epic. But then I woke up and realised that not only had my coffee gone cold, it had also grown mould.

So I scrapped that idea. Bruce's wife, my aunt Geraldine, suggested a cycle trip through the Baviaanskloof instead and offered to provide vehicle support. Sold! I had only one question: Could I take my two Jack Russells along?

Let's hit it!

After months of mental preparation and meticulous daydreaming, I left everything to the last minute.

Fortunately Geraldine did all the grocery shopping, which I was grateful for, because I would have filled my shopping basket in the sweets-and-biscuits aisle.

We left Cape Town early. I would love to give a descriptive narrative of the journey to Willowmore, but I was nursing a hangover and I didn't see much except the pillow in the back of the Kombi.

I do remember us stopping at Ronnie's Sex Shop outside Barrydale, though. The walls were decorated in limericks and crude jokes and the bar was framed by lingerie: everything from your grandma's bloomers to candyfloss G-strings. Bras of all shapes and



▲ **ON YOUR MARKS.** After spending the night in Willowmore, Sean and his crew set off along the dirt road into the Baviaanskloof.

sizes hung from the rafters, thick with dust and stale cigarette smoke.

My Jack Russells, Tequila and Turbo, enjoyed the stop as much as we did. Say the first letters of their names together and you get TNT. A Jack Russell is dynamite in a small package, and my two leave a wake of shrapnel in their path.

Tequila is a stick addict who is obsessed with playing catch and will run until he drops dead from exhaustion. Within two minutes he had his weapon of choice clamped between his teeth and his first hapless victim in his sights. The pub patron picked up the stick and threw it from the stoep onto a grassy hill. Tequila, 0-100 in a split second, didn't see the swimming pool...

A scene from one of those old Looney Tunes cartoons ensued - he went backside over brains into the water. Everyone had a good laugh, but I had to share my pillow with a wet and smelly mutt for the rest of the journey to Willowmore.

The Willowmore Caravan Park (☎ 044 923 1116) was

immaculate, with excellent ablution facilities. The caretaker, an elderly gentleman with cloudy eyes cradled by deep wrinkles, was eager to offer any assistance. He spoke with a husky voice, breathless from years of smoking cheap tobacco.

My only complaint about the caravan park was that the clock of the church next door chimed

what seemed like every 15 minutes to remind you it was in working order.

We set up camp in the faltering light. Heavy grey clouds gathered in the distance and the occasional flash of lightning pierced the darkness. Fortunately there was just a light spatter of rain, which cooled the air for the next day's 50km cycle to Uitspan. >



▲ **NICE CYCLING TAN.** Sean's advice: wear sunblock! Here he is recovering at Uitspan.

It's a dog's life

We were amped to get going, so we struck camp and aimed for the R332. The road was easy to negotiate with our bikes and trailers, but I would recommend a bike with front suspension as a minimum requirement. Bruce was riding a Giant Sedona with no suspension, and I heard some serious muttering through clenched teeth.

Perhaps it's fanciful to endow animals with human emotions, but I could see my two dogs were smiling from ear to ear. Most days they get a walk on Fish Hoek beach, but it's seldom they get to run at full stretch.

Because they weren't conditioned to this kind of running, we took lots of breaks (sometimes more for our benefit than theirs). I checked their paws and gave them a good drink of water every 5 km. The previous night's rain meant there were lots of puddles for them to cool down in.

After about 15 km Tequila started to slow down, so we put him in the trailer. He was uncertain at first because he hadn't been trained yet to sit in a trailer, but at our next stop it took quite a bit of coaxing to get him out.

About 20 km from Willowmore we stopped for lunch: a

sumptuous buffet of ProVitas, cheese wedges and bully beef, quickly washed down with orange-flavoured Game so the taste wouldn't linger in our mouths. For desert, some Zoo biscuits shared "evenly". (What Bruce didn't see wouldn't hurt him...)

Turbo, only 11 months old and with shorter legs than Tequila, really surprised me with his stamina. He stayed right on my heels, mouth wide and drooling. He wasn't going to get on the trailer and take the easy way out.

About 25 km from Willowmore Geraldine passed us in the Kombi and we decided that the dogs had

had enough for the day, so we let them ride in the car for the rest of the day's route.

Nuwekloof Pass was the highlight of the day. Great jagged teeth of rock, scarred and cracked by the elements, rose vertically from the valley floor and towered overhead. Cycling through such tormented rock formations, criss-crossing the dry river bed, left us humbled.

Soon after, we arrived at Baviaanskloof Uitspan (www.baviaansuitspan.co.za) and I quickly polished off two beers in the bar. Then I had a swim in the dam and cleaned my cycling kit. We didn't bother with tents, just

made our beds in the lapa.

Before I wriggled into my sleeping bag I made a note to myself: Wear sunscreen tomorrow. My legs were roasted; it looked like I had on a pair of red thigh-high stockings.

Stiff legs, sore butt

Now, some people might consider me to be a few sandwiches short of a picnic, but I'm not a complete twit. No way was I going to pull my 30 kg trailer for a second day if it would fit in the Kombi.

Come to think of it, I actually contemplated not cycling at all, but a couple of kilometres down the road I suddenly felt fit and strong again. (The anti-inflammatory tablets and energy drinks had nothing to do with it!)

The plan was to meet Geraldine in the Kombi (with the dogs and trailers) at Vero's Restaurant (☎ 044 923 1918) for lunch.

I take my hat off to Vero for her entrepreneurial skills. At her roadside restaurant you'll find the tastiest roosterkoek you can imagine. Served outside on a rickety table with kitsch cutlery, it was quite simply the most memorable sandwich I've ever eaten.

Okay, I'll admit it: We had a second lunch of burgers and iced coffees at Bo-Kloof Guest Farm

(☎ 044 923 2192), in the shade of a giant old tree.

Only once did we cross a flowing river. The draw of crisp, clear water was too much to resist. We parked the bikes and took a long, soothing dip.

It was about 45 km from Uitspan to our next stop, Doringkloof Bush Camp (www.doringkloof4x4.co.za), where we scattered a troop of screaming vervet monkeys upon arrival.

Again, what an excellent campsite! I couldn't believe how big it is. It's obviously popular with 4x4 enthusiasts, but that day we were the only people there.

There was a dam close by – just what the doctor ordered. Or what Bruce would have ordered had he come close enough to smell me after the day's sweaty exertions.

I leapt in with my cycling kit on to rinse off the day's sweat and dirt. Tequila followed with a stick in his mouth.

That night, with our plates on our laps and fingers greasy from lamb chops, we sat and enjoyed the peace and quiet around the fire. Sparks rode thermals of heat and fell back to earth as ash. Camping bliss!

What an awesome weekend away. Thank you, Bruce and Geraldine, for the trip and for everything else!



▲ JUST CHILLING. Sean and Turbo cool down in the dam at Doringkloof Bush Camp.



▲ RIVER RIDER. Sean's uncle and cycling partner Bruce Davis rides through a river on the second day of cycling. They stopped here for a cool-down swim in a clear pool.

SEAN'S GEAR

Bike. I've had my GT Zaskar Expert mountain bike for about two years and have found it to be extremely reliable. With my bulky frame I've pushed the bike to its limit down single-track trails in Tokai Forest and haven't had a single technical problem. There have been occasional operator errors, however, which have seen me careen over the handlebars into the dirt more times than I'd care to admit!

Saddle. This was a bit of a failure. Two specialist bike shops told me to

get a Gobi seat, but it's made for pros who are half my size and willing to sit on the equivalent of a nine-inch nail to shed some grams off their bike.

Bike tool. Although I didn't need it and haven't tested its plethora of appendages, the Topeak Alien II 26-function multitool has every conceivable tool you may need for your bike. It's a bit bulky, but I'm sure it would be indispensable in remote places.

Tent. The single-person MSR Hubba

HP tent is durable and light, but a tad expensive. It has enough space for me and my dogs, and it has a vestibule where you can cook in the rain.

Cooker. It's a bit of a mission to get the MSR multi-fuel stove primed and lit, but once you've succeeded it is dependable and efficient. It burns jet fuel, white gas, diesel, unleaded petrol and paraffin.

Medical kit. Mine wouldn't have been complete without a bottle of Merthiolate tincture. It burns more

than sliding naked down a balustrade of poison ivy, but it works like a bomb on cuts, bruises and blisters.

Trailer. Bruce is a handyman and backyard scientist of note, and my bike trailer is all his work. The frame is made of square aluminium tubing, bolted and pop-riveted together, and it has an ingenious hitch that allows a large range of movement. You can even lie the bike flat on the ground with the trailer hitched to it. I was testing it out on this trip and will hopefully use it on a longer trip one day.