



## TUBING: IS IT 'BETTER THAN RAFTING'?

It's more exciting, more challenging... and involves new skills. It's wetter and better, says one participant on the new Vaal river routes. Tubing is now included in our courses. See video: <http://youtu.be/DL8vXCsoTZ8>

### DEVELOP YOUR SKILLS!

South Africa needs properly trained and qualified tubing guides. Come on a course, get assessed. Page 3

Adventure guides come in all shapes and sizes – men, women, young, older, able and even partially disabled. But whatever your physical and mental abilities, one question that faces you when you sign on for training is how you wish to be “scoped” for the work.

Scoping sets limits to what you are allowed to do. For example, a qualified hiking guide can't also be a rafting guide unless he or she gets the necessary training, experience and certificate for rafting. Scoping means what you may practice, where you may practice, and what you are allowed to do as professional. So when

*Experience on trails with clients is what counts*

## YOUR SCOPE AS A GUIDE

you set about being Assessed you need to agree with the Assessor what you will be allowed to do as a qualified guide.

### MTB GUIDE

The scope of a mountain biking guide may be:

- AREA – national anywhere in SA but restricted to:

- ALTITUDE – below 2400m
- TRAIL TYPE – cross country on established single track and bike parks.
- LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY – lead clients on easy & intermediate trails (green & blue but not

TO PAGE 2



## SCOPING YOUR SKILLS

red or black, which are difficult to severe).

- AIM or PURPOSE – to take inexperienced to moderately skilled riders on off-road trails.

### EXPLANATION

This scoping would be summarised as “MTB guide, national below 2400m cross country easy & intermediate trails.”

There are many guidebooks and websites describing and rating MTB trails in SA, so the guide would have little difficulty finding suitable trails. Remember that the scoping is for the guiding of adventure clients, not just personal or social rides.

The altitude restriction is because at the weather is more unpredictable, oxygen levels fall, there is a risk of altitude sickness and life-threatening edema, and generally trails are rougher and less well established.

### LOGGED EXPERIENCE

In deciding your scope together with the Assessor, your

experience counts. Much depends on what you have actually already done – or not done. You may be a hot extreme mountain biker (or raft guide or mountaineer) but if you have not been with clients on excursions it doesn't count for much.

You must obviously be skilled in your specialist activity and prove it in an assessment.

Before you qualify as a legal guide you need to assist on trails and get your logbook signed. The date, trail name and location, duration in hours or days, Operator, name of lead guide, number of clients, level of difficulty, and any camping, should all be entered. Get the logs signed off by the lead guide on the trip or the Operator. If there were incidents of any kind they must also be recorded.

- If you are very experienced you may submit for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) without further extensive training. [Contact AsAfrica](#) for more.
- See page 7 regarding logged time.

## OPINION

Qualifying as an adventure guide is a big hurdle for many, especially if they are not used to paperwork.

Oh sure, guides must be experts at their craft and must have a solid background in outdoor leadership. Lead guides must know how to plan, organise, communicate, manage a team, run safe trips, deal with accidents and emergencies, care for the environment, report on trips, do costings - and do all the paperwork.

The official NQF/SAQA system in SA creates only “The Guide” who can do all this. What's needed is a progressive system that creates a category of Assistant Guide who, as an apprentice, is legally able to do guiding work and has the chance to learn and practice all the routines.

Lower the bar to raise the numbers!

## Is This For You?

Find the right cross-country singletrack trail grade for your abilities

| Singletrack trails   |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Grade  | Suitable for:   | Trail   |
| <b>Green: Easy</b>   | Beginners in good health with basic bike skills. Most types of bike.                        | Relatively flat & wide.   |
| <b>Blue: Moderate</b>  | Riders in good health with basic off-road riding skills. Basic mountain bikes.              | Some “single-track” sections & small obstacles of root & rock.                              |
| <b>Red: Difficult</b>  | Proficient mountain bikers with good off-road riding skills & fitness. Good mountain bikes. | Challenging climbs, tricky descents & technical features such as drop-offs and large rocks. |
| <b>Black: Severe</b>   | Expert mountain bikers with high level of fitness. Quality off-road mountain bikes.         | Greater challenge & difficulty. Expect large & unavoidable features.                        |
| Mountain biking is a potentially hazardous activity carrying a significant risk. |   |   |

## MOUNTAIN BIKING OFF-ROAD GRADES

The table alongside is the accepted international grading for MTB trails. Excluded are forest paths and downhill courses.



GRADING SCHEME FROM :

<http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/activities/mountain-biking/mountain-biking-trail->

# INNOVATION IN ADVENTURE

*New sports demand new guiding skills – and more care*



**STAND-UP PADDLE BOARDING (SUP) is one of the new sports that seem to pop out of nowhere – and everyone wants to try them. The problem is that members of the general public are more prone to accidents (because less fit and bomb-proof) than tough outdoor types. And safety protocols for the public may still be in development.**

Guides who undertake to lead people in new sports carry a special responsibility. They must ensure safety, coach newcomers, master the technical maintenance of equipment during use, and provide a level of activity that suits ordinary people.

The leader has a “duty of care” to safeguard people who have paid their money and want their thrills. Very often these people don’t know what they don’t know: they are truly unaware of the risks, or if aware of them, are willing to take risks without considering the pain and costs that may follow.

And who ends up being blamed? The guide and those who organised the event. It’s difficult to stay safe when people go all out to risk their necks. They want bragging rights but they may get the wheelchair.

In new sports the limits of safety are not all that well understood. Even in established adventure activities the unforeseen can and does happen.

In new sports the risks increase. Falling off a stand-up paddle board onto rocks is like falling off a mountain bike: cuts, bad bruises and broken bones. Protective wear like shinpads and body armour add

## **PIONEERING ON THE DUSI**

*7 men and two women started and finished the gruelling 2015 Dusi Canoe Marathon standing up most of the way on their flimsy boards. A new sport, running rapids on SUP, has caught the public imagination and it’s only a matter of time before commercial trips are offered. To make it work as an adventure activity, a new breed of guide will be needed. Do the rewards outweigh the risks?*

to the costs of operations. Business owners may not want to make the outlay until the new sport proves to be popular and is making good money.

This puts everyone – including the guide – at risk.

People pay for an adrenalin rush – but how far do you go to satisfy their expectations without having accidents? Adventures are sold as being exciting and potentially dangerous. They are seen as alternatives to beach holidays and driving your car to see the sights.

On an adventure, the customer gets the sun and the scenery plus the physical and mental challenge of doing something pretty wild and extraordinary. To give in to their most reckless urgings is to put your career as a guide in jeopardy. Don’t risk it.

Operators and guides are not necessarily covered by the Indemnity signed by customers in advance. If negligence is shown – failure of the duty of care – you may be punished by having to pay damages or even be criminally prosecuted.

So think before you try something new. Experiment to find out what can happen: and set the limits.

# WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH, THE TOUGH STUMBLE

*Nature is a bed of roses, right? Nothing can possibly go wrong, go wrong go wrong... Here's a story of how things may go exactly as planned. By Graeme Addison*

*Long ago, on a river far away, and as far as I can recall in the mists of time...*

There was a special rafting weekend: New Year. Just one thing to complicate matters: one of the clients, with his son and daughter, was a senior merchant banker from London considering investing in the rafting operation. Staff were warned to be on their best behaviour.

The base camp beside the river was a little bit of heaven. With only the roar of nearby rapids and the call of the fish eagle, it resounded with peace and contentment.

Until now.

The old adage applies: plan for the best but expect the worst.

## COUNTING MISTAKES

On arrival the banker gave his hired car keys to the camp manager for safekeeping. First mistake.

Then, at the end of a spectacularly wild rafting trip down the Gorge, the shuttle vehicle refused to start. Maybe this wouldn't have been so bad if the weather had played ball. But the mother and father of all thunderstorms was coming over the horizon, sending bolts of lightning into the valley. And the vehicle, with all its passengers crouched at the back, was open to the heavens. Second mistake.

Third mistake. In attempting to hot-wire the shuttle, the driver blew



the immobiliser. This shuttle was definitely going nowhere.

This was in the days before cellphones. But even today it's doubtful that you could get reception in that remote area.

As torrents of freezing rain and hail pelted down - with clients laughing, screaming and crying all together - the Lead Guide decided to run back to base, a mere 20km or so over rugged Zululand terrain. More vehicles were on call if he could get there.

## NO POWER

He did, and after a few hours the miserable rafting party made it back to base. Not without perilous experiences in the dark of night. The rain had turned the last kilometres into the camp into a quagmire which resulted in people having to hike through mud and quicksands.

**SUFFERING A SENSE OF HUMOUR FAILURE?**

Send us your memories of those moments when you had a life changing experience – in a negative or positive way. Add photos if you have any.

On arrival, the camp was dark as lightning had knocked out the generator. No hot showers, few torches, paraffin lamps getting blown out by the wind, clients unable to find their beds and their things, and a lot of cursing.

But the worst was this was supposed to be a New Year party. A rock band had been hired for the occasion, to blast in the New Year with a throbbing crescendo of guitars, drums and vocals. They were now silenced. Glum. Sitting out the night. Drunk.

Attempts to restart the generator having failed, it was decided to have a sing-along, fuelled by plenty of dark rum. It all went well until a local chief with four MK47-toting bodyguards arrived to claim his New Year tribute in bottles of brandy, cash, or anything going. It was at the

TO NEXT PAGE

# THE TOUGH STUMBLE

FROM PAGE 4

chief's say-so that the camp had been built, and management was forced to entertain his demands with grudging acceptance.

You gotta do what you gotta do.

That was probably the fourth mistake, embedded in past history. When clients saw the armed guards they imagined something much worse was going on, and fled the party. As the chief and his henchmen departed with what was left of the liquor cabinet, the camp fell absolutely silent.

It was a silence of fear, anger and dismay at being cheated of New Year festivities. Old Man Weather was partly to blame, but real screw-ups were due to pilot error.

The dawn came like the moments before a battle. As daylight filtered

them out of the safe? Keys have a habit of walking away on their own.

The merchant banker was having none of it and a message was somehow dispatched to contact the car hire company in Durban. Send spare keys or a mechanic!

Meantime, the Lead Guide had asked me to stand up at breakfast and say: "This kind of thing doesn't happen often". For some strange reason it sounded unconvincing.

Deadly stone-faced glares met me over the scrambled eggs. I suppose this was Mistake. Number. Five.

When you're falling off the cliff there's nothing you can do to stop yourself, see.

The Lead Guide hid in the toilets (roof blown off). The rock band got their stuff together and went away sullenly.

**It was 'the experience of a lifetime' – and best forgotten – but hey, they all survived!**

down from the high escarpment and the summer mist swirled over the muddy river swollen by last night's cloudburst, the merchant banker announced he was leaving early. He was not in a holiday mood.

## FIND THE KEYS!

Only one problem: where were the keys? First mistake returned with a vengeance. Keys were, er, put somewhere. In the confusion of last night they, sort of, disappeared... wait a moment, they must be here somewhere...or there... Maybe the chief took them? Maybe the rain washed

The merchant banker twiddled his thumbs and fumed. Management tried to put a bold, happy face on things, congratulating everyone on a New Year to Remember.

Hmmm. That won't be too difficult.

Eventually a mechanic dropped from the sky (I really don't know how he got there, as the rains were back) and in a trice he had the merchant banker's car going.

I really don't know how he drove the vehicle through the quagmire, but I guess rage spurred him on. Nor do I know how management dealt with the financial fallout.

What I do know is that shit happens.

## ASAFRICA RIVER GUIDE COURSES NOW INCLUDE TUBING

River guides used to dismiss tubers as "hole bait" looking for a place to drown. True, people who did not know how to read the river and what to watch out for did risk everything on a doddle down the rapids.

It was par for the course to drink beer or brandy, not wear a lifejacket or helmet, and go out when the river was "nice and high" – in flood.

Things have changed. Many operators in South Africa and abroad now offer tubing alongside rafting, mountain biking and abseiling as typical adventure sports. Proper safety equipment and guiding procedures have developed.



Also what's changed is the technology of the tube itself. Very few commercial operations still use tractor tubes. The "gecko" above, developed by Ark Inflatables, has a foam floor and pointed ends, making it more like a little boat than a donut. It can be controlled, whether you lie on your stomach or back, kneel or sit with legs over the side.

It's not the same sport as rafting but rivers are the same, so we've introduced tubing in our standard river proficiency programme.

**GOT A STORY TO TELL? SEND IT TO US. THE BEST WINS R100**

# ADVENTURE GUIDE TRAINING & ASSESSMENTS 2015



**The Wild Professionals. We offer advice, guidance, training and assessing**

The courses and assessments all relate to the Generic Adventure Site Guide skills programme (GASG). This requires (A) that you obtain a specialist certificate for your adventure activity such as rafting, hiking or MTB. Do a course and once you have mastered the skills, submit for speciality assessment. The certificate must be issued by a qualified Subject Matter Expert (SME). And (B) you need to complete the Assessment for tourism skills. This may be done online or on paper, and there are different costs and procedures involved.

AsAfrica can register and coach you for either online or paper assessment. We run facilitated workshops at our base and away, lasting several days, to help you navigate through the complex requirements.

GASG is the only route to qualifying as an adventure guide in whatever specialities you choose. For example you may choose to qualify in rafting, abseiling, hiking and mountain biking. In each case you need the activity certificate and will have to repeat parts of the tourism assessment.

|        |           |          |   |                              |
|--------|-----------|----------|---|------------------------------|
| MARCH  | 7-8       | Sat-Sun  | Hiking guides GASG Facilitated Assessment Workshop    | Otters' Haunt, Parys         |
| MARCH  | 29-Apr2   | Sun-Thur | River proficiency & guiding course                    | Otters' Haunt, Vaal River    |
| MAY    | 3-4       | Sun-Mon  | River guide assessments                               | Otters' Haunt, Vaal River    |
| MAY    | 6-8       | Tue-Fri  | Adventure guides GASG Facilitated Assessment Workshop | Otters' Haunt, Parys         |
| JUNE   | 28-July 2 | Sun-Thur | Orange River Gorge training trip                      | Onseepkans, N Cape           |
| JULY   | 19-23     | Sun-Thur | Mountain bike guide training course                   | Otters Haunt, Vredefort Dome |
| AUGUST | 16-20     | Sun-Fri  | Doring River training trip                            | Clanwilliam, Cederberg       |
| OCT    | 12-15     | Sun-Thur | River proficiency & guiding course                    | Otters' Haunt, Vaal River    |
| NOV    | 22-23     | Sun-Mon  | MTB and river guide assessments                       | Otters' Haunt, Parys         |
| NOV    | 24-27     | Tue-Fri  | Adventure guides GASG Facilitated Assessment Workshop | Otters' Haunt, Parys         |
| DEC    | 13-17     | Sun-Thur | River proficiency & guiding course                    | Otters' Haunt, Vaal River    |

## THE PROCESS

[Contact us](#) to discuss your options and get the Booking Form for your chosen course. If your speciality is not listed here we can still help with advice and by putting you in touch with Subject Matter Experts. The generic tourism part of the qualification is much the same for everyone, except that you must design Adventure Trip Plans for each different type of activity and fulfil other special requirements. The GASG assessment is done in the context of your activity.

**The costs** will include the registration fee, training course, speciality assessment, facilitated workshop and final GASG assessment. 2015 registration fees differ between the online course (84 pounds sterling or the paperwork R600). Training courses vary from R950 to R1950, and assessments may or may not be built into the training fee. The 2-4 day facilitated workshop similarly ranges from R950 to R1950, and the GASG assessment to follow would be similar. Groups get discounts. You will also need personal equipment and whatever it costs to travel and stay at the venues. Costs vary for different activities and duration so contact us for and a quote.

**Registration** gets you onto the [Adventure Qualifications Network](#) (AQN) list and you then receive an official national learner number from CATHSSETA, the Sector Education and Training Authority for hospitality and tourism. AQN is the accredited training institution for GASG, to which we are affiliated.



# WHERE CAN YOU LEGALLY WORK?

In principle the GASG qualification is national. The term “site” means that you may work at any site where your skill applies.

But the level or range of your skills will depend on your training, experience and proven river competence.

For example, a river guide who has only worked on one river like the Vaal or Highveld Crocodile cannot be expected to guide on unfamiliar waters such as the Tugela, Umkomaas, Ash, Orange, Doring, Palmiet, Olifants (Limpopo) or Blyde. To qualify as a national river guide one needs countrywide experience on higher grade rapids. Otherwise one’s scope would be limited to your local river. It is possible to extend the scope by gaining more experience and repeating parts of the assessment. What you are experienced at and what you are allowed to do will be decided in discussion between you, the SME and the final Assessor, who passes on the recommendation to the Moderator (who has final say).

- *Through its associates in various parts of SA, AsAfrica can offer you the chance to gain guiding experience on a variety of rivers.*

In principle, the fully competent River Guide who is scoped to lead trips anywhere in SA will have Class 4+ experience on all major rivers in the country and some abroad. This can take years.

Meanwhile, go for what you are capable of, and resubmit for assessment at higher levels.

# ABOUT RIVER TRAINING COURSES



*A 4-DAY RIVER PROFICIENCY & GUIDING COURSE is coming up on 29 MARCH-2 April on the Vaal at Otters’ Haunt. This is what to expect.*

**MEET Sunday evening 5pm** for the briefing and a social supper. Notes are handed out and the days to come discussed. We are using the Otters’ campsite and Roundhouse (see below). Get there early to pitch tents near Roundhouse service block. Bring your own braai & booze for first night. We collect R500 from each participant for the food kitty and arrange the buying.

*DAYS are devoted to practical river work and NIGHTS to lectures. Cooking and cleaning chores are shared, as part of the training. FEEDBACK sessions deal with what has been taught, learnt, and needs to be learnt.*

**DAYS ONE & TWO** – We equip those who do not yet have their own kit for river guiding. Sign out equipment. Initial river exercises – swimming, ropework, knots, and belays. Reading the river and classes of rapids. Safety talks. Rafting and tubing. Trip discipline, safety, rescue, emergencies.

**DAY THREE** – River trip organising, logistics, packing and departure. We are camping overnight on an island. The trip is designed to teach the basics of river expeditions including environmental principles, nature & wildlife, and of course planning, equipping, safety and emergencies.

**DAY FOUR** - Complete the river trip and return to base for revision of skills. Go over the Observation Checklist for the raft guide speciality assessment to come in 6-8 weeks. Review where to find the Presentations that cover every skill step by step. 3pm Farewells and departure.



## THE VENUE

Above: Heron’s Nest conference room – where we meet for talks and videos. Below: the Roundhouse serving the camp.





## HOW TO CONTACT US

OFFICE: + 27 56 8181814  
DIRECTOR: + 27 84 245 2490  
[assess@asafrika.org](mailto:assess@asafrika.org)  
Twitter: [@DirectorASA](https://twitter.com/DirectorASA)  
Web: <http://asafrika.org/>  
Based in Parys, Free State  
PO Box 289, PARYS, 9585, RSA