

# Athletes take a run on the wild side

Photo: Nick Muzik



## Taryn Arnott van Jaarsveld

Many would tremble at the thought of setting foot in the open wild of the Greater Mapungubwe Transfrontier Conservation Area and World Heritage Site and surrounds, knowing that some Big Five animals lurk there.

But to trail runners who headed out into the bush in Mapungubwe, Botswana and Zimbabwe to run 92km over three days, the sound of feet pounding in the wild outdoors is bliss.

This year's Mapungubwe Transfrontier Wildrun, held in May, took runners across savanna in Botswana's Tuli Block, over the confluence of the Shashe and Limpopo River, into rural villages in Maramani, Zimbabwe, and through the Mapungubwe Transfrontier Park and World Heritage Site.

"We made sure that the routes were as wild as possible. Not

the kind of thing you could do in the car or on the bike," says MD of Wildrunner, Owen Middleton. "It's only by being here, and only by smelling it and feeling and touching it, that one can really experience this 360 degree environment."

While runners were treated to African cuisine, and overnights in comfortable tented accommodation, there was much physical work to be done during the day. The first day's 30km included a route into Sentinel Ranch in Zimbabwe.

On day two, runners covered 34km while traversing the confluence into the Northern Tuli Game Reserve in Botswana. On the third and final day, runners crossed back into South Africa for a run through the national park. Another treat is that runners were taken on a tour of historical Mapungubwe Hill.

"There's a rich heritage,"

says Middleton. "Mapungubwe is one of the oldest known civilisations in the southern hemisphere. That creates a very powerful picture. It's electrifying. It brings out all your senses."

Runners were accompanied by rangers and guides through the bush and measures were taken to keep them safe during the journey.

"Nowhere else can you run and stop and watch elephants, and run on elephant trails," says Middleton.

"This area has a long lineage of people running across this landscape, whether it be traders, trackers, hunters, or people moving across to the coast to trade," said journalist Mark Mattson while attending the inaugural event in 2016.

"As runners we have come and joined part of that long lineage. It's a pure and perhaps even at times primal experience, and certainly very powerful."