

# Endurance Athletes from all over South Africa will participate in the Quarter century Challenge to do FIVE daring events IN ONE YEAR!



*Midmar, Dusi,*

## “Millennium Big 5 Challenge 2025”



*Cape Town Cycle Tour, Comrades, Mt. Kilimanjaro*

### The Comrades

There is so much history attached to the Comrades that it is not possible to do it complete justice in a few pages. Vic Clapham conceived of a race between Pietermaritzburg and Durban that would honour fallen soldiers - hence the name “Comrades”. In 1921 Bill Rowan was the first person to complete the race in which a mere 34 athletes took part. Since then a grand total of 130 000 athletes have completed the 90 kilometre journey, which alternates in direction each year, resulting in an “up run” and a “down-run”, both being equally strenuous. There have been notable Comrades wins for both men and women. The “doyen” of the Comrades would be the popular Bruce Fordyce who won 9 times with eight wins in succession. Russian Elena Nurgulieva won the Comrades for women eight times.

Even though the race is always from Pietermaritzburg to Durban or in the opposite direction, there are one or two slight variations each year, due for instance to factors like road works or other construction activities. Vic Clapham ensured he would never be forgotten when he introduced the idea of the Comrades Marathon and then, importantly, turned it into a reality. He was the founder of the oldest and largest ultra-marathon.

The First World War made a lasting impact on Vic Clapham who while in Africa, regularly participated in route marches. He recorded having walked over 1700 miles (2736 kilometres) during that time, while wearing a 60 pound (27,2 kg) backpack, which at times was as heavy as 90 pounds (40,8 kgs). Clapham also noted how formerly out-of-shape men were capable of transforming to meet the challenge posed by the route marches.

He created a challenge in remembrance of those times which celebrated the contributions and sacrifices of those who served in the Great War. The London to Brighton Stock Exchange walk prompted him to ask “Why not place an event for South Africa? And this led me to the idea of a race from Durban to Pietermaritzburg. I thought the 54 miles from Durban to the City would be right, comparatively, especially as the competitors had a prize to go for, were in splendid health and in light attire...”

At first however Clapham met with opposition to his proposed race. He remembered someone saying of him “Old Vic is suffering from the effects of the sun and fever in East Africa”. He sought the backing of the League of Comrades of the Great War, but for three years his appeals were rejected but then approved. In addition, small medals were cast to be presented to every athlete that finished the epic 12 hour challenge.

Clapham drummed up interest in the event by promoting the race in Natal newspapers. The idea fascinated the public. It was unlike anything attempted before and its scope was beyond the imagination of most.

The first Comrades Marathon was run on 24 May - Empire Day - 1921, starting from outside the Pietermaritzburg City Hall.....”