



BIG FIVE - IMPORTANT COURSE INFORMATION

Dear Big Five Marathon Runners,

Marathon Tours is the official North American partner for Albatros Travel from Denmark, the organizers of The Big Five Marathon. Here is some important information regarding the course to help you prepare for this challenging adventure.

START – The Big Five Marathon starts and finishes at Lakeside Lodge on the upper escarpment. Runners staying at the other lodges will be transferred to Lakeside in jeeps. An early breakfast will be served at each lodge before departure.

The marathon and half marathon have separate start times. The marathon is scheduled for 9:00am. The half marathon will start at 9:15am. Please note that the presence of wildlife near the route may cause delays.

FINISH – All finishers will receive a medal at the finish line. After the race, a buffet lunch will be served at Lakeside Lodge. Jeeps going back to your own lodge will depart when full (*10 passengers*). It is possible to use a shower next to the medical facility at Lakeside. Please bring a towel along if you wish to shower before heading back from the finish area.

ROUTE DESCRIPTION – The Big Five Marathon is known for its challenging course which takes runners through incredible scenery and showcases the natural beauty and wildlife of South Africa.

The start and finish line are situated at Lakeside Lodge on the upper escarpment. After the start, the marathon as well as the half marathon routes take the runners past Ravineside Lodge, the Entabeni Monolith and further on the lower plateau. The first section is run on dirt road made up of red sand. Runners will pass a few hills (*nothing too bad... the worst is yet to come!*). And when you reach Hanglip View Point, you backtrack and run back before you reach Yellow Wood Valley. Pay attention to this section as the surface is very uneven with loose rocks, pebbles and holes.

The Yellow Wood Valley is the most dreaded part of the course. You are about to run down the steepest slope of your life! This sharp descent is on a paved surface. The next three kilometers or so will be excruciatingly hard on your quads as you negotiate the steep slope. You reach lion country after the descent. And although the next nine kilometers are flat, you're running through deep sand. Full marathoners do a 9km loop whereas half marathon runners run a 2km loop.

This brings us back to Yellow Wood. And yes, you guessed correctly. We're going up the dreaded hill this time. Be prepared to take things slowly as it's virtually impossible to run up this hill.

The route carries on to Long Drive, a narrow valley, where marathon runners do a 6km loop. Half marathoners run across the valley and reach the final section of the route. This section is run on dirt trails, a welcome respite from the deep sand and loose stone terrain earlier on.

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The end of the run is fairly hard (*final four kilometers*). We run halfway down the ridge, which provides us with a wonderful view out over the plateau's lake. The surface is fairly bad, consisting of hard uneven stony ground with plenty of large rocks and stones of all sizes. This final part has quite a few hills and as the surface is loose, it pays to keep a careful watch on the ground as we run towards the finish. With the finish line in sight you can now take it nice and easy.

CUT OFF TIMES – The Big Five Marathon has **extremely strict** cut-off times for this event. Please review this information carefully.

Marathon

- Cut-off #1 – 26.5km – 4 hours and 15 minutes after start
- Cut-off #2 – 32.5km – 5 hours and 15 minutes after start
- Cut-off #3 – Finish Line – 7 hours after start

Half-Marathon

- Cut-off #1 – 10.5km – 4 hours after start
- Cut-off #2 – 16.5km – 5 hours after start
- Cut-off #3 – Finish Line – 6 hours 45 minutes after start

Runners who haven't reached the cut-off points in time will not be allowed to continue and will be picked up by a ranger vehicle and taken back to the finish line. The cut-off times are **strictly** enforced to keep everyone safe! It is recommended that you add at least 25% to your "flat" marathon time (*ex. If you are a 4 hour marathoner plan for this race to take you 5 hours*).

*Please keep these times in mind especially if you are on a quest to complete a marathon on all seven continents. Should you finish even 30 seconds after the cut-off times you will receive a DNF and it will not count towards a completed continent.

SPECTATORS – The Albatros team will try to drive spectators to the airstrip where they'll be able to see the full and half marathon runners pass twice. It will not be possible to go to the lower escarpment for spectators. Given the fact that wild animals are present, spectators are not allowed to walk freely around, but at the airstrip there will be extra rangers and visibility is good, so you can walk a little back and forward on a stretch of approximately 350 meters. There will be additional information about spectators on inspection day. The location for spectators is subject to change.

WEATHER – The weather is very dry, sunny and cool at this time of year. Participants can expect an average temperature of around 60 – 70 degrees Fahrenheit, but with variations due to sun, shade, wind and altitude.

DRINK STATIONS – Drink stations are located along the route at approximately every four kilometers (*two and a half miles*). Water and Coca-Cola are served at all stations. The drink stations will be open until the last runner has passed. Electrolyte drinks and bananas are served at selected drink stations and at the finish line,

PERSONAL SUPPLIES – Personal supplies (*energy gels, food, drinks, clothes, etc.*) can be placed at selected drink stations along the route (*five places for marathon runners and four for half marathon runners*). Personal supplies must be clearly marked with your bib number and which drink station they are to be placed at.

If you have any questions, please call Ann at 617-242-7845 from 9am-5pm EST.

Good Luck in the Race!

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