

Long-term support sustains Sappi Karkloof Classic

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As the weekend action approaches for the Sappi Karkloof Classic trail festival, the event organisers are once again taking time to thank their sponsors and partners for their valuable support.



Source: Ant Grote / Carreplan Media

The two-day mountain biking and trail running event's title sponsor, Sappi, has helped the event survive the hardships of the past few years and maintain its place as one of KZN's premier trail events, but the benefits of their sponsorship go way beyond the sporting event.

"The Sappi Karkloof Classic allows us to showcase the work we do in the Karkloof Forests and other Sappi forests," said Zelda Schwalbach, external communications lead for Sappi Southern Africa.

"We have been a supporter of the Karkloof Classic since its inception, firstly via the local forester at Karkloof giving small prizes and allowing the participants access to the trails in the Karkloof area, and now for the past few years we have become the naming sponsor.

"It is an important event for us because it brings so much value to the area and allows us to showcase what we are doing with the Sappi Trails Programme and participants can see the benefits to the surrounding areas.

"Through well-established partnerships and collaboration, the trails on Sappi's land have become a safer and more enjoyable option for riders, runners and walkers.

"The Sappi Trails Programme was initiated in 2011 in response to the growing interest amongst mountain bikers wanting to access and build trails in our forests. Strategic workshops with our partners have helped shape the programme to ensure that our investment in this initiative today truly benefits the local economies and communities surrounding our forests, delivering shared value and social impact for neighbouring communities.

"These trails have grown from being exclusive to cyclists, to also include trail runners and walkers.

"Sappi's Trail Programme – which has resulted in partnerships with trail custodians such as the Karkloof Country Club and Tranquilitas in Mpumalanga – dovetails neatly with Sappi's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

"Through focusing on the SDG, we aim to promote the responsible use of our land through providing access to recreational users. By providing access to the land, visitors to the trails experience the biodiversity and natural scenic beauty that this land has to offer and what we are doing to preserve it for future generations.

"These trails have also provided much needed economic support for surrounding communities, bringing about work and economic growth in the area, aligned with the company's commitment to create shared value by ensuring that the trail networks result in broad based economic beneficiation.

"In certain areas such as the Karkloof where the trails are now visited by more than 7,000 recreational riders each year and where the annual Sappi Karkloof Classic Trail Festival draws approximately 1,500 entrants, an economic impact study by KZN Tourism indicated that the annual projected income in the Karkloof area was approximately R231 million.

"In addition to the Sappi Karkloof Classic event, Sappi has also been providing land access over the last 18 years to other trail events such as the KAP sani2C – one of the world's largest and most successful mountain biking stage races – which, besides generating more than R50 million per annum for the region (according to a KZN Tourism estimate), also benefits numerous schools and communities through generous donations and grants.

"Projects such as the Karkloof Adventure Tourism Incubator (ATI) which led the formation of Nguni Trails – which helps build and maintain the more than 250 km of trails in the Karkloof – are further positive outcomes. A well-functioning trail team leads to better trails, which draw more visitors who support the local tourism economy including visiting tourism attractions such as the Karkloof Crane Conservation Centre, yet another proud legacy project in which Sappi has been involved, and which harbours all three of Southern Africa's crane species.

"These factors, along with the strong partnership between Sappi and the Karkloof Country Club have resulted in the Karkloof Trails being ranked number one in the The Top MTB Trails in South Africa for 2021; no small feat in a country where mountain biking has become the new golf.

"With many of Sappi's own employees being passionate riders, runners and conservationists, the trails on our land also provide excellent recreational opportunities for our own people.

"Many of our employees are passionate cyclists and runners and the Sappi Karkloof Classic is a lovely family day for our employees.

"The event ticks a lot of boxes for us," added Schwalbach.

Other faithful partners of the weekend's trail festival include aQuell, who have kept thousands of Karkloof participants hydrated through the years, as well as supporters Stihl, Marriott Investment Managers, Spring Meadow Dairy Farm and Timber Solutions.

The Sappi Karkloof Classic Trail Festival 2023 will take place on Saturday 27 and Sunday 28 May. More info can be found at <https://www.karkloofclub.co.za/events/sappi-karkloof-classic-trail-festival-2023/>

Sappi Karkloof Classic Trail Festival 2023

Saturday, 27 May 2023

07h30 - 21km Trail Run

08h00 - 9km Trail Run

Sunday, 28 May

07h30 - 60km MTB

08h15 - 40km MTB

09h00 - 20km MTB

09h20 - 9km Trail Run

09h30 - 10km MTB

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