

By Lisa Johnston

For the horses

Lloyd Gillespie and Isabel Wolf have taken the expression 'horse mad' to a new level by embarking on a 7 000-kilometre ride to raise funds for the Transkei Equine Welfare Project and boost awareness around African horse sickness. *Getaway* caught up with them 5 580 kilometres into their Riding for Horses adventure.



What sparked the idea for this ride?

In July 2009, we rode from Port Alfred to the Transkei and our two horses came down with African horse sickness (AHS), from which they recovered. It was a ride of about 350 kilometres and we enjoyed the experience so much we decided to do a bigger ride but to couple it with a good cause, that of spreading awareness about AHS.

Where have you been so far?

We've completed 5 580 kilometres of the 7 000-kilometre journey. We started in Durban, headed up the coast to the Mozambique border, inland around Swaziland up to the outskirts of Kruger National Park, then to Musina, the Marico River, the Orange River and down the West Coast to our rest stop in Cape Town. We have 10 horses, mostly hardy Boerperd breeds, which we rotate to give them

time to recover. We've been taking it easy on the horses; we don't need to break any records.

Was the entire trip planned from the start or do you make things up as you go along?

It took a year to tie up loose ends, such as closing down a business, planning the route and finding sponsors. The rest happens on the road – we stay with farmers who put us in touch with others along the route. They also help us move our support vehicle, which contains medicine, feed and camping equipment.

Have you wanted to call it quits at any time?

(Lloyd) Never. It's been tough, but I've been guiding for many years and I love an adventure.



Riding for Horses

AHS is a highly infectious but non-contagious disease with nine viral strains. It's characterised by fever, respiratory and circulatory damage and loss of appetite. Vets at The University of Pretoria's Onderstepoort campus, together with foreign collaborators, have made a vaccine that is 100 per cent effective against one of the strains. One of Riding for Horses' aims is to raise R90-million for research to develop a vaccine against the other eight strains. It also funds the Transkei Equine Welfare Project, which educates poor communities on horse health and assists with vaccinations, deworming and disease control.

The more difficult things become, the more I love it. It's been tougher on Isabel, but neither of us has come close to quitting.

What has been the highlight of your ride?

The best part was heading out on the first day with a year of planning behind us. A lot of people want to go on a pilgrimage but never get the chance. On the first day, it felt like everything in my life had led to that point.

Do you think it'll be difficult to adjust to 'normal' life?

We were staying in Cape Town and waiting for permission to pass through the

city. After a few days, we started getting edgy. We're so used to moving. We want to keep riding after this trip, but we're not sure how.

You've been shown great kindness; what has stood out?

Aside from our sponsors, so many people have helped us. The one that sticks out is when we got to Mafikeng. One of our horses had contracted AHS and we were forced to stay there for five weeks. Our bakkie started giving us problems and we were put in touch with Gert de Necke at the GD Truck Centre. He'd heard about us and said he wouldn't let us leave town without fixing our vehicle. Gert must have

spent R15000 to R20000 overhauling the engine, fixing the brakes and other things. When we wanted to show our appreciation, Gert said, 'You know, repairing a vehicle is easy for me. It's the least I can do to help.'

Has this ride changed your perspective on South Africa?

Isabel is German and has been here for three years. It's been a big eye opener for her, some of it positive, some negative. There's this perception that South Africa is unsafe, but we've never felt threatened. ■

Follow Lloyd and Isabel's ride or donate money at www.ridingforhorses.co.za.

