

EDEN BIATHLON HISTORY

In 1990 the Chairperson, Dr Altus Strydom, was residing and teaching in Joubertinia – about 180 km from Oudtshoorn. For years he was managing SWD Biathlon from that distance. There were no league meetings – mainly a trial meeting and interprovincial competitions. Limited number of athletes participated. On the SA Biathlon ranking SWD was ranking 13th out of 14 provinces. Only a handful of athletes attended the SA Championships.

That year Dr Altus Strydom decided to lay down the reigns of SWD Biathlon because of long distance travelling and workload. The then SWD Sport Federation decided to second their vice chairman, Dave van der Walt, to assist in re-structure SWD Biathlon and see what can be done to revive the sport code. This was easier said than done! The finances were in the red, there was almost no volunteer management and the sport code itself was experiencing low competitive numbers. Interprovincial meetings in the SWD were organized by neighboring provinces because of the dysfunctional organizational structure at that stage.

The short-term goal set to Dave van der Walt was to restructure SWD Biathlon, re-establish the management and promote the sport in the judicial area of SWD Biathlon at that stage. The area covered an enormous territory – the outskirts being Plettenberg Bay, Joubertinia, Swellendam, Bonnievale, Beaufort West. Because of the distances it was difficult to organize regular meetings. Also did it clash with traditional school sport codes that took up most of the Saturdays. Dave van der Walt realized that it was by no means an easy task and that funding was totally insufficient to meet the demands. There was no apparatus – they had to borrow stop watches and other apparatus from his school, Oudtshoorn High, in order to stage meetings. Oudtshoorn High School form an integral part of the revival of SWD Biathlon in the future and Dave van der Walt started to recruit volunteer members to run biathlon in the SWD. The decision to start closer at home with the re-organisation process seemed to work. Personal visits to all Oudtshoorn-bound schools, swimming clubs and athletic clubs seemed to stimulate the situation. This process was extended to all the main towns in the SWD – George, Mossel Bay, Knysna and Riversdale. Today Eden Biathlon boast with no less than 26 clubs/schools.

The first interprovincial meeting was organized by EP Biathlon in Mossel Bay in 1990. The then EXCO decided to move it to Oudtshoorn the next year as Oudtshoorn offered perfect facilities to host such a meeting – an Olympic standard swimming pool [NA Smit] and a tartan athletic track [De Jager Sport Complex]. Dave van der Walt contacted one of his school learner's father, Alec Hooper, the owner of Highgate Ostrich Show Farm, to sponsor the very first Highgate Interprovincial Meeting in Oudtshoorn. This sponsorship is still ongoing and with the exception of 2 years [when Congo Caves stepped in] it is now in its 33th year! This meeting has grown to become the second largest biathlon meeting besides the SA Championships in South Africa. Highgate has become a household name in South African biathlon!

The constitution was redrafted in order to adapt to the needs of SWD. Innovative plans were made to grow the sport. Tuesdays were set as the competition days starting at 17:00 – this gave all our athletes an opportunity to compete. This leave them to participate in other sport on Saturdays! This seemed to work for SWD. Swellendam and Bonnievale moved to the Boland province making it easier to administer the SWD province. Schools were organized as clubs so that parents that want to compete can do so in conjunction with their children. This also helped in order to administer that biathlon as sport in SWD. There were a number of "families" who gave their all to promote biathlon in the SWD and in most cases formed the management of SWD Biathlon – the Swarts of Mossel Bay, the McKay's of Oudtshoorn, the Fourie's of George, to name but a few!

From ranking 13th from 14 provinces, SWD has developed and grown to be ranked under the top 4 provinces in South Africa. SWD not only supplied many SA Champions but also contributed to the SA Biathlon Management where Dave van der Walt was elected as Vice President in 2013. At present Stephnie McKay is serving as a national selector. The same can be said on provincial and district level in Western Cape and Eden – where SWD/EDEN Biathlon played major role on the executives.

In order to grow the sport a league system was introduces where league meetings were hosted in George, Mossel Bay and Oudtshoorn. From a humble start in the early days these league meetings now attract around 150 competitors every time.

SWD played in major role in Development. Many development clinics and practical workshops were and are hosted by SWD/EDEN Biathlon. This is in most cases funded and supported by the Western Cape Department of Cultural Affairs & Sport. Major projects were hosted at Zoar and Carpe Diem. SWD/EDEN also played a major role in the accommodation of the disabled athletes! A trailer was sponsored by Klein Karoo Motors. This trailer is stocked with all the necessary apparatus to run a meeting of development clinic at any place!

In 2017 SWD decided for fundamental reasons to change their name to EDEN Biathlon. This was in line with the National Sport and Recreation plan. This also gave biathlon a route for applying [and getting] funding from DCAS for administration, development, transformation and major events! From a meager 55 athletes in the early 90's Eden has grown to around 300 at present.

In 2017 Dave van der Walt stepped down as chairperson after 27 years and was replaced by Stephnie McKay. He however was requested to assist as operational manager in order to keep continuity. From a "one man show" in the 90's Eden Biathlon has developed to such an extent that a fully functional Executive Management of 14 are in place!

In 2001, 2013, 2020 and 2021 SWD/EDEN hosted the SA Championships. Unfortunately the 2020 and 2021 events were cancelled as a result of the Covid pandemic. But SA Biathlon allocated the 2025 & 2026 SA Championships to Eden Biathlon again. The 2025 SA Championships was hosted successfully with more than 900 athletes from all over South Africa attending. Eden Biathlon is now in the process of preparing for SA2026 to be hosted in Oudtshoorn.

EDEN Biathlon is proud on their good governance history – for 30 years clean audited financial statements were issued and from a negative balance in the 90's the financial position of EDEN Biathlon is sound at present. EDEN Biathlon is also affiliated to SA Biathlon, WC Sport Confederation and EDEN Sport Council.

Eden Biathlon is still in the ongoing process of writing sport history.....