



## **LOCAL SOUTH AFRICAN RIDES EUROPE'S FAMOUS PILGRIMAGE FOR CHARITY**

Xx July 2011: After tearing his anterior cruciate ligament, receiving surgery and six months of intensive rehabilitation, local South African Hardus van Deventer was inspired to raise money for disadvantaged children by embarking on a gruelling solo mountain bike adventure along one of Europe's most famous centuries old Christian pilgrimage routes, the *Camino de Santiago de Compostela*.

When his rehabilitation ended, van Deventer, a member consultant for PPS, the specialist financial services provider to graduate professionals, bought a mountain bike to continue his strength training and decided to use the opportunity to aid his recovery and raise awareness for those who do not have access to quality medical care in South Africa.

"Having such good access to quality medical care made me realise how many people, particularly children, do not have this choice. As a result, I wanted to use the experience to do something that could help those less fortunate. I chose the SOS Children's Village to help raise awareness and money as it is such a deserving charity and does such good work."

The *Camino de Santiago*, also known as The Way of Saint James, is considered one of three worldly pilgrimages and attracts thousands of devotees each year. Comprising a collection of routes, all of them culminate at the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela where the apostle Saint James was once said to have been laid to rest.

"The cultural history and the significance of this pilgrimage appealed to me and so my campaign was born; to cycle along the *Camino Frances* route to symbolise a hardship that many South Africans struggle with everyday."

Armed with a few t-shirts, a sleeping bag, tickets, passport and some cash for food and lodging, his 800km epic journey started at Pamplona and lasted two weeks without a single day's rest. Van Deventer would average around 50km per day.

"I'm an inexperienced cyclist, so it was challenging enough physically, but the mental blocks you're faced with on a mountain slope are almost insurmountable. However, when you come to a place like Galacia, where the beauty reminds you of the Knysna forest, and you're riding for a charity, you feel inspired and you keep pushing yourself to reach Santiago de Compostela," said van Deventer.

"There's no real tarmac, it is a single track hiking route so it is a tough bike ride but the changing scenery from the rolling hills of the Pyrenees to the open desert terrain and then the Spanish countryside make it worth the while."

Van Deventer says that the last five days of his trip were the toughest and although the pilgrimage is not reputable for cycling, he met up with two Spanish riders who helped him through the last distances through sign language and broken English and Spanish. "I was exhausted but the locals were friendly and hospitable and we became good friends."

"Whether you are walking or riding, the *Camino* is a riveting personal journey and I would recommend it to anyone who is looking for a challenge. My only advice would be to make

sure you are prepared for the challenges that lie ahead by training beforehand and learning some Spanish will also come in useful,” advised van Deventer.

To recognise his efforts, PPS donated R5,000 to the SOS Children’s Village and van Deventer plans to continue his awareness campaign in 2012 by cycling a 1,000km route from the Andes Mountain in Chile to Argentina’s Patagonia.