

# HardTales in the Wild

Bears Don't Scare Me - October 2003

Confidence is an amazing thing, extremely hard to find, yet super easy to lose.

Two days after landing a bronze medal at XTerra Nevada, I found myself floating up the toughest hills and hurtling off the gnarliest steeps. My confidence was sky high and speeds increasing.

Descending a fast but technical piece of single track however, the left side of my handlebars clipped a tree. The tiniest of branches hooked my rear brake lever and before you can say 'uh ohh', the eject mechanism was triggered and it was time to taste Nevada dirt.

I've had far worse crashes; emergency wards are no mystery here. A couple of scratches and a bruised ankle being the only visible evidence of my latest jaunt, I thought back a couple of months to when, in a similar tumble, my best mate tried to delay his wedding by breaking his wrist and shoulder. It could have been worse for me.

Swimming the next morning, my ankle hurt, but the icy waters of Lake Tahoe helped. Re-mounting my trusty steed (after some running repairs at the local bike shop), I set off to reclaim the trail that had rejected me less than 24 hours earlier. At the first pinch however, I knew something was missing. Struggling to gain traction, I found myself dismounting far too often. A two-hour climb had taken nearly three and the Anger was rising. Having reached the top, I snapped the shifter and set the chain onto the big gear. Stomping on the pedals I attacked the descent with a venomous hiss! But the hiss was soon overwhelmed by the squeal of brakes! Where had all these rocks come from? Who covered the smooth lines with deep sand? How did the track change, I demanded!? But it wasn't the track; it was my confidence levels that had changed. They were shot!

The next day proved no different, except my right hip flexor had become sore to touch and my ankle left me limping. Big Girls Blouse! The last time I pulled a hip flexor was in the sack! Day three was worse and I ached all over.

Day four found me battling the mountain with Cliff. Cliff had beaten me at XTerra by 30 seconds. He had put four minutes on me during the swim and a further two and a half minutes on the run. I had clawed back six on the bike, so when he pulled away on the second climb, the Angry Man was fuming!

Labouring along a slow windy single track, trying to find Cliff, I was startled by a movement in the bushes to my right. As quickly as it began, the movement ceased and a deep-throated growl penetrated the serenity of the mountain. Having just unclipped for a rockhop that should have been steamrolled on the middle chain wheel, I peered into the bushes and remembered all of the instructions on the Park Warnings;

1. Make yourself look bigger

2. Move away slowly
3. Don't look into the Bears eyes
4. Shit you pants
5. If attacked, fight back.....Bugger that!

When the bushes broke and the hairy black monster charged out, I WAS GONE!!! Clipped in and spinning, I thought 'that bastard had better be a good runner if it wants a feed, cause this bit of Bacon is out of here!' I was hauling like Lance!

A few turns later I was again startled, but this time by a couple of hikers! I skidded to a halt and gasped "Bear!". The younger of the hikers clutched her companion's arm and cried, "Where's Sammy? Sammy!".

Her look of terror almost immediately turned to relief and I looked back to see the biggest friggin mongrel ever bounding down the trail behind me. The look on my face gave it away and the two hikers burst into laughter. My 'Bear' was a three year old New Foundland ..... named Sam! By the way his hair stood on end, it was obvious that I had scared Sam as much as he had scared me, but Sammy would never feel my embarrassment.

"Kiwi?" asked the older of the two hikers. "Ahh... Yeah." I replied. It was the only way to explain being sooo bloody stupid!

With my tail firmly between my legs I bid the hikers good day and set off after Cliff, I could here them laughing for about 5 minutes! With little effort however, I caught Cliff on the next climb. "I thought you were faking it you little prick" Cliff wheezed as I sidled up to him. On the return leg, I left Cliff way behind. Confidence on the bike was soaring once more. I didn't mention the 'Bear' incident until the end of the ride. By that time I was less humiliated and able to laugh about it. Just writing about it has helped me swallow my pride some more, and I am getting comfortable with the whole fiasco. Pride may be a powerful thing, but confidence is King, so I don't care if I was embarrassed because my riding has improved.

The moral to the story;

'If your confidence is down, keep at it! you never know what will spook you back to your best.'

### **Angry Man**

