

HardTales in the Wild

Reflections of an Insomniac - November 2003

1:30am is hardly the time to be writing an adventure tale, let alone starting a new one, but that's exactly what I found myself doing at Honolulu's International airport. Waiting for QF4 to board, it dawned on me that one great big adventure, filled with dozens of smaller adventures, was coming to an end. I'd been on the road in America, racing and training for 10 weeks and in my hot little hand was a return ticket to Kingsford Smith airport, although I hadn't expected to be home until late December.

Despite our (the teams) best endeavours, all attempts at some much needed sponsorship had failed and I had pulled the pin on competing in the richest sprint race on the adventure calendar, the US\$200,000 Mild Seven Outdoor Quest, to be held in Borneo December 11-16. That meant getting out of the money trap named America and heading home to train and race until next years O/S season commenced. It's a shame as I'd secured Team Nokia's Elina Maki-rautala from Finland along with expat Aussie Toby Cogley and kiwi Matt Blundell (both from Team Millie) to race under my 2004 banner 'Team HardTale' for the event. Pulling the plug on Borneo and leaving early also meant foregoing a spot at the Balance Bar 24hr in Los Angeles next weekend and passing up the chance of racing a 4 day epic across Maui at the start of December. Oh well.

Reflecting on what I'd achieved since late August, it was hard to remember anything but the last two weeks. Sure there were a few medals and a cocky chest to pin them on, as well as a bunch of 'Been there, raced that' T-shirts to show for my efforts, but mostly my mind (and stomach) was a spongy blur of ice-cream and lazy days!

After the Xterra Worlds it was four days before I could put shoes on my blistered and swollen feet and the best part of a week before I could walk more than a few hundred yards without sticks. You don't need a degree in quantum physics to figure out that week was a write-off, but it wasn't all bad. In one session alone we managed to spend the best part of 30 bucks on ice-cream, which the four of us devoured in one ad break! The next morning Ali cooked pancakes. What do you think we had with them? You guessed it, another couple of litres of ice-cream! Unable to fend for myself, I was completely at the mercy of the three girls and ice-cream was their weapon of choice.

For the guys on the reader list, you're probably thinking 'Lucky Bastard! He's on Maui, island paradise, with three fit and attractive single women, being pampered and spoon fed ice-cream. Probably bearing witness to countless pillow fights between the girls who, wearing nothing but string bikinis and coconut oil, wistfully flicking rolled up pillow slips against naked flesh, dance frivolously atop unmade beds among floating feathers and playful giggles.' What? Not friggin likely! The only pillows to fly were aimed at me and there was nothing playful in

their intent! Island paradise my arse! Have you forgotten what I look like? Blue skies, white sands and aqua waters mean one thing to me, SKIN CANCER!! Maui is Polynesian for HELL!!! A friend of mine got married here about five years ago. When I asked how the wedding was, she shrieked "Don't f@#%ing start ME!" It was so bad that they decided to renew their vows this year...in AUSTRALIA! The groom went tropo the day of the wedding and no one seemed to know why. I'll bloody well tell you why! For starters, our dollar is pissweak at best against the greenback, but on Maui we may as well offer Pesos! The prices here are three times that of the mainland, which is twice as much as in Aus and our monopoly money is only worth half of theirs to begin with! To add to the pain, after you have mortgaged the house to buy something like a simple loaf of bread, they slug you with a previously undisclosed tax! Now I know a LOT about tax. Dodging it has been my entire adult life's work! Australia's largest financial services company paid me the big bucks to teach their planners how to dodge it for Christ's sake. But do you think I could work this mongrel system out?

Then, when you have negatively geared the already mortgaged house, to pay the tax and secure the loaf of bread, eating it simply devastates you. It tastes like shit! I've eaten sugar cubes that are more savoury! The Americans soak abso-fricken-lutely everything in sweeteners and preservatives. We had a BBQ chicken one night and I thought it was the dessert! This chook was so sweet it tasted like blueberry pie. No wonder the yanks are so bloody FAT! As for the Stupid and Lazy titles that often go with Fat, if they can't work out why they're so Fat, the STUPID kind of fits on its own! Americans, drop the sweeteners and leave the carbo-loading to the endurance athletes! (Not you Liss, you're from Capitola and only Smart, Skinny, Beautiful and Energetic people live there.)

When my feet healed enough to drive, we hired a car in order to take in Maui's top five attractions. Car hire was reasonable enough at only \$50 a day.....plus tax, \$22 a day.....plus collision insurance, \$36 a day.....plus uninsured 3rd party insurance, \$24 a day.....What the F#!k? All this for the smallest car they had!

Back to the attractions. The brochures said 'we would be left breathless by the Road to Hana'. After two and half hours of winding road, the girls were so car sick, they feared that opening their mouths to breathe would lead to a car full of second hand ice-cream. Brochures one, tourists nil! Crossing 52 bridges on this endless journey through rainforests, we were told to expect countless waterfalls, but the tour guides failed to mention the island had been in drought for 5 years! It had been suggested that we also take the tour audio tape to enhance the journey, but they didn't inform us that the only reason the tape had been made was because there was no radio reception on this road to Hades! Even my sultry tones failed to ease the girls' pain. Brochures two, tourists nil. Arriving in Hana, we were dismayed to learn there was absolutely NOTHING there! And the only way out was the road we'd come in on!

Feeling a tad cheated, the next day we set off to tackle Haleakala, the islands 10,023ft dor-

mant volcano. This almost extinct (tourists still hold out for the faint chance that she'll blow and take the rest of the island with her) lump of lava rock boasts the world's longest uphill road. At 39 miles or 64 km, it probably is, but Christ it's boring! I've climbed fences with more interesting features! At the summit, we expected to be sitting on the rim of a vast chasm, the plummeting edge of a bottomless crater. All we saw were clouds that occasionally broke to reveal a flat brown expanse, no deeper than my bathtub. The 'Crater' had filled in a couple of hundred years ago when she last blew her biscuits.

Sucking down our boiled eggs and granny smiths, possibly the only unsweetened food on the island, the four of us contemplated suicide and couldn't help but feel a little more cheated than the day before. Hoping to restore our rapidly diminishing faith in Maui, we set course for Lahaina to take in the 'Spell Binding' production, Halena. (Maui's version of Cirque de Sole) It certainly was spellbinding. Two minutes in to it and we were wondering what the hell was going on! The tour company hadn't mentioned it was a comedy, but seeing as the joke was on us, I guess it didn't matter. For the special price of \$80.....plus tax, we got to see semi naked tele-tubbies stomping around the stage holding several paper mache fish and one paper mache pig! I didn't know whether to laugh or cry, I think Anna and Steffi did both. My favourite part was the curtain call and when the Fat Stupid audience gave the Fat Stupid actors a standing ovation, we walked out. It was shit. Leaving the theatre, I vowed to become a cartographer and rename Maui the Moorea Atoll, in the hope that the French would nuke the place.

The next day, Steffi, Ali and I took our final swim together, a paltry 500m, before I dropped them off at the airport to end their suffering. Anna had decided to stay for her birthday (the next day), so we chose one last attraction to end the trip with. A Helicopter ride. A 60 minute whole island flight could be secured for a meagre \$330 per person.....plus tax. But all of the tour operators listed this as the number one thing to do on Maui!

Now I'll admit upfront that I'm not a big fan of flying when the aircraft has less ability to glide than a Fairy Penguin. That means helicopters and hot air balloons are way down on my to do list. But I sucked it up and gave Maui one last chance.

My advice to anyone contemplating a trip to Maui..... take the helicopter ride first, second and last! You will shoot up over Haleakala, which is amazing by air. It's contradicting colours and surfaces of rocky cliff lines, ashen flats and lush rainforests engulf you. Then as you soar coastward over the road to Hana, countless waterfalls leap from hidden cliff lines littered among the lava flow troughs to wash away your previous disappointments in a flurry of spraying water. By the time you reach West Maui's Jurassic Iao valley and dash along cliff hemmed gorges to float within inches of the 4000ft crying wall, whose falls spout from unseen chasms high on the cliff walls, you will honestly be searching for Pterodactyl and Tyrannosaurus Rex believing that you truly have travelled through time itself. It is incredible.

I had begun to like Maui for what it is, raw and relatively untouched, despite its numerous resorts and condos. The next few days started with an early morning swim and ride, followed by a midday nap on the king sized bed in air conditioned comfort before rising mid afternoon to stroll empty beaches with my best friend and a pair of boardies to watch the setting sun as it sunk deep into the Pacific. Maui really is a beautiful place.

Angry Man

