

# HardTales in the Wild

Support Crew Speak - December 2004

## Ma and Pa Eggs Vacation

I decided to walk out from the transition area to meet the team on the completion of their second trek . It was around 11.00pm on the 3rd night, pouring rain and I was worried that the team was around 3 hours overdue. I had driven my wife nuts with all the scenarios going through my mind and there was nothing else to do but wait. I turned my head light off and waited. It was pitch black and very eerie in the remoteness of the west coast of NZ. For around 10 mins I kept believing that I was seeing lights flash along the mountain side. Down the track a lonely figure came out of the darkness, walked up to me and said "Mr B?" then walked off as if I wasn't there. A little way back there was the rest of the team with one member being supported and hobbling on a pair of sticks.

I knew they were all suffering and in big trouble but I remembered Matt's words, "Dad if you can't say something positive to us, don't say anything."

The only thing on our minds now was to feed them, get them warm and have a rest. They had been going for over 60 hours and the Southern Traverse looked as if it had got the better of us. A lot had happened over the last few days, both in getting to the event and the weather conditions.

We arrived in Christchurch on the Thursday night to find that the kayaks were on the north island, we were on the south island and it was a public holiday on Friday. Matt said, "don't worry, they will be here". By Friday lunch time we had collected them, sorted out the gear and were repacking ready for the drive across the country to Hokatika. Six of us crammed into a land cruiser with all our gear and bikes piled in the trailer.

Registration on Saturday, briefing and maps on Sunday. The briefing used a stunning 3D computerised overview of the course and the terrain. The team rested and ate for two days, I think they call it bulking up. The weather was changeable, drizzling and they expected things to worsen by race time.

Race started at 9.00 am on Monday in the centre of town, with a band playing and local schools giving full support to different teams and the GG of NZ in attendance. With a 4 hour bike leg to transition 1, the team was ready !

**Transition area 1.** Our team came in mid field, Matt had punctures and Freya could not select low gears, one hour behind leaders, quick transition to mountain trek. Some help was given to me from an American support crew to fix the bikes. We were the last support crew to leave transition after a flat battery, due to my leaving the lights on for four hours. Now it's raining.

**Transition area 2.** Rain, wind, mud, rocks, cow shit and nowhere to park. Tried pitching awning, too windy and the wrong poles. Tried lighting the gas cooker, gas leaks and flames are leaping everywhere, heaps of duct tape to stop the leak. Is this a sign of what's to come or just the norm for support crews?

It's now freezing and there's snow falling on the mountain trek, we don't have the right gear and the team is wearing lightweight Gore-Tex. Yes, we are in trouble. The team next to us has two camper vans, heaps of room, a shower and somewhere to cook. We still can not get out of the 4WD.

The team has been out in a snow storm and walking to keep warm for around 25 hours.

Most teams had a dry place, time for around two hours sleep and a good meal.

We succeeded in feeding our team but there was no time for a sleep, we started up the car and turned on the heater, they at least thawed out. It's still raining and we get them off on the next bike leg. The 4wd came in handy in the mud, (at least we didn't have to be towed out of the paddock like so many others). We did not have long to get to the next transition as it was a short bike ride to the paddle leg.

**Transition area 3.** We passed the team close to the start of the paddle leg and quickly set up the kayaks. Prior practice made this job easy and they were off on their paddle. Unfortunately for them the wind and the swell had picked up and the short rudders were not ideal for open water. Load up the bikes then off to the other side of the lake to pick up the team. When the team reached the far side we got them back on the bikes just in time for a huge hail storm to dump on us. Things just were not getting any better. They had around a four hour bike ride to the next trek stage.

Freya was quite adamant that after shredding her rain pants on the first leg she would not start the next trek unless we found new ones (they were mandatory equipment). As a matter of fact the support crew also decided that rain gear was a good option. Amazingly we found rain gear at 8.00pm in the only shop that was open on the west coast after an hours drive to what looked like a bigger town on the map.

**Transition area 4.** Nowhere to park again, some teams were setting up tents so we decided to do the same. With one edge of the tent on the road and one edge on a 3m drop off we waited for the team. They arrived at 9pm. After a hot meal they were in desperate need of a sleep. Just as they hit the sleeping bags down it poured and the wind was collapsing the tent. I spent two hours standing on the edge of the tent, holding onto the guy ropes in the pouring rain. I also had to wave cars down to stop them running over the tent as the team slept inside. They were up again at 10.30pm and started the next 20 odd hour trek. We quickly loaded up again and drove into Greymouth in search of hot food and a laundry. We found warm pies and spent two hours doing the washing and drying in a 24hour Laundromat. I had

a sore back from trying to keep the dryer doors closed as the shoes tumbled around inside.

**Transition area 5.** We arrived at 3.30am, it was raining, there was nowhere to park so we just propped in the middle of the road and slept for two hours. Wednesday was a beautiful day, we found somewhere to park, dried out the wet gear, got the bikes ready and decided to get some gas for the cooker which had now settled down (it had sprung a leak and tried to blow us up on earlier attempts to ignite). Pulled into the take away, looked at the menu and I asked for an egg and bacon roll. "Nope" she said, "got no bacon." "Ok I'll have a...." "Nope" she said, "we only do take away on Thursday , Friday and Saturday." Which now leads me to the start of the story.

It's raining again and the team were desperate for food as they ran out hours ago, That was our fault as we did not get around to checking that all their back packs were full of food. Six of us spent a miserable time either cramped in the car, sitting under the leaking tarp over the kayaks or laying in the muddied floor of the control tent.

Team Hardtale had run it's race. Paul's hand was so swollen that we woke up the medic to look at it, they advised that he should not go on. Freya's feet ballooned as soon as she took her shoes off, Matt had no feeling in his left foot and Andrew had torn shin muscles. They still wanted to proceed the next day and all tried walking and riding their bikes, but soon realised that the only option was to withdraw. It was a hard decision for everyone.

Kerry and I had had an interesting time up to now but the breaks had not come to us or the team. We are proud of the team's effort and how they managed to go for as long as they did with so little sleep in these conditions is beyond comprehension. They were still a tight team and no blame was placed on any one member for pulling out . They had made a team decision. They spent the next two days planning for next year's event. They learnt a lot and they will be ready to take on possibly the toughest adventure race in the world.

Next time the support crew will have a camper van, a kitchen, a shower and gum boots. We will be back.

The people of the west coast were very friendly and helpful. Everyone knew of the Aussies with their green and gold hair. In amongst all the hardship and let down we actually enjoyed ourselves. If you are interested in adventure racing I urge everyone to have a go at being in the support crew.

**Pa Egg**

