

HardTales in the Wild

Capital Punishment - December 2003

In the final instalment of the 2003 Maximum Adventure Series, 22 teams converged on the Nations Capital for a day of self-abuse in the city and surrounds. Starting at one-minute intervals from the picnic area at Molonglo Gorge, teams were able to select their own route as they set about collecting as many checkpoints as possible in the 10 hours available. The checkpoints were spread from Kowen Forest (Mountain Bike Mecca) to Black Mountain (foot sloggers delight) and along Lake Burley Griffin (paddle boating paradise) and its encircling bicycle paths (set aside for roller blades). Competitors were also allowed to choose which discipline to tackle first after a short cycle to Transition Area 1 (TA1) on the rivers edge opposite Burley Griffin Canoe Clubs Boat shed. "It will allow competitors to use tactics that incorporate wind conditions, temperature and technical strengths, something that has not been offered before in Australia," suggested race organiser Gary Farebrother.

At 8am, Q Kayaks & Last Minuters captained by Steve Cooper and Kevin Morton, were the first teams off the blocks and to the surprise of onlookers sped off into Kowen Forest to attempt the mountain bike stage early. They were obviously banking on a strong Westerly breeze in the afternoon to drive them home in the boats. Team HardTale, captained by Matt Bacon, having recently returned from a season racing in the US, exploded off the line in a formation that would have rivalled the Australian Track Cycling Team, as they made their way to awaiting boats. Race favourites and locals Team AROC Salomon (Tom Landon Smith and Alina McMasters) also chose to hit the Lake early and with special adventure racing paddles attached to their packs, looked a treat in bright yellow race wear. Team Crank (Matt DeBelin and Mike Meryment), series leaders and contenders on the day, reeled in five teams on their way to the boats, but their luck ran out when 100m into the paddle, they developed an air leak and had to abandon ship. Returning to TA1 for a new boat which cost them time and precious energy.

As part of the kayak, teams landed on Springbank Island only to find a challenge lay ahead. One competitor from each team had to work out what the temperature and barometric pressure was using a Casio Sea Pathfinder watch (no instructions were provided). Most teams made easy work of this task, clipping their control card and moving on in quick time.

By 10:30am several teams were scouring Black Mountain for 9 lonely checkpoints. There should have been 10 Checkpoints, however 1 had grown legs prior to race start and left its hiding place (This was confirmed as Teams Fatboys, Geocentric 1 & 2 and Atlas Racing all crested the grid pointed knoll and formed a human chain to search for the wayward marker). For some teams the foot Rogaine was more of a running race and Team HardTale emerged first to don roller blades at Transition Area 2 and work their way back to the bikes at TA1.

AROC Salomon were quick to rain on HardTale's parade as they swept by with cross-country ski poles propelling their roller blades to amazing speeds. Team Cranks' woes continued as they emerged from Black Mountain to pull on roller blades for only the second time in their combined 63 years. The first time was the night before and the lack of experience made progress slow. With the series title on the line they pushed on bravely in the knowledge that they would soon be on the bikes where their dominance would show. AROC left TA1 with a 22-minute lead and looked set to achieve the unthinkable ...clearing the course.

By the time the leaders hit Kowen Forest there was scanty 4 hours remaining and the field was spread from one end of the course to the other. As the mercury rose many racers had to back off the pace or suffer the effects of heat stroke. Team Fatboys' Andrew Harmer and Team HardTales' Paul Barry were two experienced racers to feel the pinch as they cramped with the onset of dehydration and greedily sucked down Hammer Gel endurance fuels, a new sponsor to the Maximum Adventure Series, to ease their suffering. Running out of time and energy, teams began to turn for the finish line and as quickly as they crossed it, event organisers tallied point cards to place teams in order. As the clock wound down, it was evident that teams AROC Salomon and HardTale were battling for the race win and when Team Crank crossed the line and tallied their points, they prayed their efforts had been enough for the series title.

When AROC Salomon emerged on the road leading out of the forest and sped for the finish, grinning like Cheshire cats, it was evident that they had indeed cleared the course, the first team to do so all season.

At the presentation, the top teams from both the mixed and same sex classes, as well as the overall top three were treated to a bounty of prizes from race sponsors Kathmandu, Casio G-Shock, STM, Headland Press, GPSport and Hammer Gel. There were so many prizes that a lucky draw began and as teams heard their race numbers being called they mounted the rostrum to collect some fantastic gear. Once again the Maximum Adventure Race was a great success and all left feeling completely exhausted yet proud of their achievements. Undoubtedly race autopsies will continue until the first round in 2004.

Race results: 1st Team AROC Salomon (2531 pts), 2nd Team HardTale (2375 pts), 3rd Team Geocentric (1950 pts), 4th Team Crank (1940 pts), 5th Team Fat Boys (1770 pts)

Series results: 1st Team Crank (6936 pts), 2nd Team AROC Salomon (6611 pts), 3rd Team HardTale (4674 pts), 4th Daniel and the Three Dwarfs (3880 pts), 5th Fat Boys 3 (3830 pts)

Angry Man