

# HardTales in the Wild

Spanked by the Monster - May 2004

"Come in to my room Ant." I found myself mumbling 45 hours after starting the Cairns Quoll Adventure Race. I had seen the tree from the road side and some dark, mystical force had drawn me closer. Hollowed out and decaying, yet with three sides still in tact, this ancient leaf bearer was around 1m in diameter and stood some 20ft high. Approaching the old trees remaining shell it struck me as odd that what had appeared to be red dirt in the centre was in fact grey loop pile carpet and the rotting branch to one side was no less than a queen size bed with fitted sheets and a soft blue dooner! Hang on a minute! This is my room! How lucky is that? Just as I positioned myself to flop onto the bed Ant's calls brought me back to reality "Matt! Keep up, we're looking for a creek junction, keep your eyes open."

I'd been in the grips of the sleep monster again. With less than 40 minutes sleep since the race start two days earlier, the monster was all over me and not letting go. I'd first seen him 9 hours earlier whilst paddling on Lake Koombooloomba. Seated at the back of our two person Mirage Sea Kayak, sticky eyes were plaguing me and Dr Carl's infamous 'Micro Sleeps' were washing over in waves. Then out of the corner of my eye I spotted it, an old concrete twin tub laundry sink with fully functioning running taps. It couldn't have timed its appearance more perfectly. At that very moment I was concerned that my hands had become sticky and it would affect the grip on my tennis racket, so I reached over and proceeded to hold my hands under the running water?!. "What are you doing!" Ant screamed as the kayak tipped violently to one side. Lucky he couldn't see what had just happened! In my sleepy state I had in fact driven the end of my paddle deep into the water, so deep that both hands were emersed and we were only moments away from a very wet and rude awakening.

24 hours earlier we were hiking along a particularly slippery stretch of tropical rain forest when Ants legs seemed to come alive. Dozens of squirming blood sucking leeches had attached themselves to him and were not letting go. My own ankles were no better and as they injected their anticoagulant, Heparin, into our legs, the blood flowed freely into their hungry mouths. Removing the vile creatures doesn't stop the blood flowing though, and the backs of our legs were crimson for hours. At last count we had plucked over 300 of the miserable worms from above the sock line and prayed they hadn't advanced any higher! Now it was an unseen creature sucking the life out of us and riding my back with gusto.

Frighteningly enough, these experiences are all too common in Adventure Races, the longer ones that is. After 24 hours of solid exercise and no sleep, you can expect some minor hallucinations. After 40 hours, the gloves are off and it's you versus the big, dark hairy beast known as the Sleep Monster. He fights dirty and almost always wins. His tactics involve waiting until you are in a position where stopping is either impossible or just plain dangerous,

then he comes at you fast. If you don't arm yourself with caffeine and great team-mates, his attacks can be quite serious. Walking off a cliff is a real possibility out there and I had already unwillingly woken up next to my bike when only moments earlier I had been riding it! Ant and I were struggling. We had made more mistakes in this one race than we had in all our races since teaming up last November. Silly mistakes had cost us at least 9 hours and with enthusiasm waning, the sleep monster was just one more thing to deal with. His mates, the Tiger Leeches, wait-a-while- vines, ticks, snakes, spiders, blanket fog and misty rain had all taken pretty big swings at us along the way. One of the snakes seemed friendly enough though. His name, oddly, was Mr Snake and Mr Snake asked us to stay and chat with him a while on the side of the road. As the debate raged inside my head as to what race Mr Snake was, Ant seemed to read my mind (and body language) and in a mothering fashion said "no Matt, we don't pick Mr Snake up, he doesn't like that. Come on, follow me." Sleep deprivation can make you do silly things indeed.

Our race came to an abrupt halt early on day three when hypothermia set in after our third 20 minute nap. Sighting 'Irreconcilable Differences' with his space blanket, my team-mate was pulled from the course by the race doctor with only one stage remaining. We had fought our way in and out of the top five several times by this point and it was a disappointing end to a disappointing race. Unfortunately the biggest hiding had come from our own mistakes and we left with a huge list of things to correct before the next outing in June at GeoQuest. The Quoll course however was amazing and we can't wait to get back and make amends in 2005.

## **Angry Man**

