

HardTales in the Wild

Wiseman Subdues Angry Man- August 2003

A Wiseman told me to return, by Ferry, to the scene of my trauma and have a Maximum Adventure, then I would surely pacify the Angry Man within, he was a wise man indeed.

Three months ago, Gary Farebrother and I scurried out from under the warmth and relative comfort of a pile of discarded cardboard boxes. We cursed the cold and the miserable bastard that had only seconds earlier tried to steal our bikes, before settling down on a couple of park benches to continue our vidual for the headlights of a soon to be arriving support crew that never came. 12 very cold hours later, some locals showed pity and served up a hot breakfast to help thaw us out and recharge our energy levels. Needless to say, we autopsied our performance many times to see what went wrong and how it could have been remedied. When in high school, I trained horses for pocket money, so the adage 'If it bucks you off, get straight back on" was nothing new, unfortunately I employed Monty Roberts' 'Horse Whisperer' techniques and never actual got thrown. So returning to Wiseman's Ferry, the 'Angry Man', as Team Crank's support crew had dubbed me at GeoQuest (that's another story altogether), was ready to attack.

This time out I packed extra water, enough Gu and Powerbars for 48hrs, 2 space blankets and a fire in my belly. Regardless, I was going to finish this race and do so without disturbing any support crew. As I entered Race Headquarters the night before the start, the place was a hive of activity. There were dozens of highly trained volunteers feverishly setting up communication systems, first aid stations and emergency rescue teams, not to mention competitors milling around to try and get an early look at the course.

At the 7pm registration we were given grid references for the first two stages. There were 1000 points up for grabs and the course looked very hilly. I mapped out a possible route before learning that private property had been crossed and I was out of bounds. A closer look revealed that a new route, which may just allow a stop at every checkpoint, would enable me to get up on a plateau and hammer for most of the day.

After loosing all of my team-mates and their replacements to illness and injury, the plan was to race solo, but at 9:30pm, Gary introduced me to a bloke named Hugh, and suggested that we team up for the race, 'for safety purposes' The 'Angry Man' in me arrogantly said to Hugh, "if I drop you on the first hill, you're on your own", lucky for me Hugh didn't take it personally.

On race day, the 'chosen route' strangely turned out to be unpopular with the other competitors. Tailing Team Crank along the flat sealed roads, without passing any other teams (which doesn't make sense when riding with the boys from Crank), I almost questioned the wisdom of the decision. But as we hit the first climb, a one kilometre hike-a-bike with 200m of eleva-

tion gain, we caught sight of Team Bilby along with Daniel & the Three Dwarves (all singing merrily). From the four teams to choose this route, outright positions 1st, 2nd and 3rd would be filled, which shows the importance of route selection.

Eight hours later, after crisscrossing tracks with Team Bilby and Team Crank many times and brief sightings of Team Fatboys, Entropic, Travelling Wastrels, Dazed & Confused (renamed 'Four Rookies drinking at the Rugby', after opting to sit out the night nav and have a few beers in front of the tele instead) and more, we sprinted home to finish without a second to spare. For the last hour as I sat in Hugh's draft, cramping severely whenever I got out of the saddle to climb, I remembered the statement from the night before, lucky Hugh wasn't thin skinned or it would have been me dropped on the last climb! Come to think of it, had he not lost his map in the first hour, he probably would have ditched me earlier

When the dust settled, we had smoked the 85klm bike course and picked up all but one checkpoint, scoring 980 points. In fact we had gone within 150m of the final checkpoint, but with no time to spare, rode on past it at 55klm an hour. The Hiking sections along the way had knocked us about a bit, but they were worth the most points so we made sure we got them all. Carrying a change of shoes was definitely worth the extra weight.

Angry Man and Hugh had the lead going into the night nav. with Team Bilby in 2nd on 920pts and Team Lost & Found in 3rd on 850pts. Team Fat Boys and Team Crank were also within striking distance on 810 and 800pts respectively. The exciting thing about the night nav however, was that it would level the field as it was very much a navigation and strategy course and not one for just the physical teams. After an hour of stuffing around looking for a trail that didn't exist, Hugh and I found ourselves miles from home and holding only 30 out of a possible 500pts! With thirty minutes remaining, we got busy and changed strategy to salvage another 220pts before bolting home with four minutes to spare. We didn't see any one else out there, which was a sure sign that we had stuffed up!

Miraculously we had still managed 3rd place for the stage, but we had slipped from 1st to 2nd outright with Team Bilby surpassing us by 40pts. Crank moved into 3rd, some 110pts back, but it was still anyone's race with the 1000pt estimator ahead of us the next day.

The final stage allowed 6 hours for completion and required competitors to Le Mans start some 750m from their canoes for a 10klm paddle (I measured 9.5 with the map wheel) to a transition zone worth 500pts, before embarking on a 15klm return run for a further 5 checkpoints valued at 100pts each. Again the map wheel read less than the trail notes, but a map wheel doesn't count falls and rises in terrain. For the rookie adventurer, the trail was very deceptive indeed, as several teams would discover. Then it was back in the boats for the return trip home.

The objective was to accurately estimate your return time! The earlier your estimate, the more bonus pts you could earn. Overshoot your estimate however, and not only would you

lose the bonus pts, you would also incur penalties.

As Hugh and I dashed toward our canoe at the front of the field, I could hear the shuffling feet of Teams Crank and Lost & Found right with us. With smart boat placement Crank hit the water first, but struggled to get comfortable in the inflatables and we soon passed them. We were never headed from that point so I can't say what order the teams exited the boats. On dry land however, it didn't take long for Lost & Found to pass us and half way around the circuit Team Crank also regathered their composure to stride by. Hugh and I kept our heads (and our rivals in sight) and with four klms to go, executed our final ploy by cutting cross country to re-pass Crank and Lost & Found. Some times it is better not to follow. We held onto the lead for the rest of the run, but hit the water at the same time as Lost & Found. On the run back to the boats it was great to see Team Dazed and Confused laughing as loudly as ever having grabbed three checkpoints. Further down the road we passed rookie Team OZ BRF who had managed two checkpoints and would finish well inside their estimated time. Well done guys.

We took it easy on the trip home as we were well under our estimated time of 5:39 (that would give us 42 pts and the win if Team Bilby took 6hrs to complete the stage or didn't meet their estimate). Unfortunately our estimate was way out as we finished with the second fastest time for the stage in 4:36 and had given up a potential 126 bonus pts! As we sat anxiously waiting for Bilby to return we silently hoped they wouldn't make their estimated 5:30 and forego any bonus points. It wasn't to be however and they had outsmarted us on the final stage to win by 58 pts with 2,330pts in total. We graciously claimed 2nd, with 2,272pts while Crank powered home for 3rd,, with 2,180pts. Team 2 Hard claimed the highest points for the final stage with 1120. They estimated 5:00hrs and finished in 4:55, talk about a close call. The only near miss for finishing on time was Team Travelling Wastrels who lost a paddle on the return journey. Regardless of the difficulties, they still arrived home in under six hours, albeit a little cold.

Despite being beaten home at the last, my demons had been exorcised and I can now go to America to race without the 'Angry Man' inside. It was a fantastic event and with the support of Kathmandu, every team walked away with a prize, not just the leading teams. Having CREST out there relaying competitor locations back to base made it exciting for the support crews as they could map their teams progress as well. For the racers, it was comforting to see the communications people out on the course and the rescue workers from NSW Cave Rescue. Once again I met a new bunch of really cool people and caught up with some familiar faces, all grinning like kids in a candy store, and that makes the event so much better. Thanks Hugh for merging with the 'Angry Man' and thanks Gary for putting on a great race. Maximum Adventure truly is becoming synonymous with maximum fun.

Angry Man