

Speight's Coast to Coast Multisport Race - South Island NZ

The Speight's Coast to Coast traverses the South Island of New Zealand from Kumara Beach on the Tasman Sea to Sumner Beach on the Pacific Ocean. Over either two days (individuals or two person teams) or the one-day event (individuals only), competitors cycle 140 kms (three stages of 55km, 15 km and 70 km), run 36 km (including a 33 km mountain stage that crosses the Southern Alps) and kayak 67kms of the grade two Waimakariri River through the Grand Canyon of New Zealand, the Waimakariri Gorge.

Having completed the two day team's event with my Dad in 2008 it was time to give it a crack as an individual. A lot of thought goes into entering an event like this as not only does it cost a bomb (I estimate I have spent around \$8,000 on entry fees, flights, gear, supplements etc) but the time spent out on your bum and legs, away from family and friends is huge and it can be quite a selfish sport if you don't balance your time right. I was lucky in that my boyfriend Scott and a close friend Dan also entered the race so we could bounce things off each other and even though I mostly trained alone, the boys were usually not far away and it was motivation enough to know they were out there feeling the pain as well.



Following a programme by the infamous Steve Guerney (8 time Coast to Coast winner) mornings, evenings and the majority of every weekend was taken up with training. Its amazing how when things are very busy in your life you seem to be able to fit in even more, and I can recall countless times when Scotty and I would fly in from work, straight off for a run or kayak, get back jump in the shower, grab a banana on the way out the door, into the car on route to a mates for dinner - and only then would we turn to each other and say 'hi, how was your day?' .

With 6 months of solid training behind us we headed over to NZ full of excitement and nerve. My Mum and Dad (who has completed the race himself 10 times) were my support crew and were amazing with their total organization and constant support. We drove from the farm up to Christchurch on Wednesday, stopping overnight before making the drive across the country to Hokitika where we would stay the night before the race.

Hokitika is about a 20 minute drive from Kumara where the race starts so at 5.20am after a very nervous breakfast my support crew drove me down to the bike stands on State Highway 73. From here I had a 3km walk in the dark down to Kumara beach where the race was to begin.

7am on the dot, Robin Judkins (Event organizer) sounded the horn and 408 two day competitors made the 3km mad dash to their bikes. This 3km run was more a sprint than a run with competitors aiming for the fastest cycling bunches and with that many competitors vying for the same positions on the road it was carnage, one guy getting tripped and the rest of the field running straight over him.



Once at my bike the aim was to try and get into a good bunch of riders. This is vital so you can draft rather than waste your legs too early on in the day. We had a bunch of around 20 riders until I heard the sounds no one wants to hear on the bike...the bunch going down right behind my wheel. I later found out a girl I had met that morning on the beach was trying to eat some food and with the slight loss of concentration clipped the wheel ahead and brought down the back end of the bunch. She fell pretty hard on her shoulder and was unable to lift it above her waste, amazingly she actually finished the rest of the cycle and then went on to do the mountain run - no mean feat if you have seen the size of the boulders you have to climb in parts of that run.

Into the 2nd transition to meet my support crew who quickly took my helmet and cycling shoes from me, replacing these with running shoes and my running pack containing all the compulsory mountain stage equipment (full set of polypro, balaclava, gloves, mid layer garment, waterproof pants and jacket, first aid kit including emergency bag and enough food for the estimated 5hrs on the mountain. The 33km run over Goat Pass starts by following the Deception River through three gorges, the top half climbing through large boulder and bush sections before breaking through to open tussocks at an altitude off 3530ft above Sea Level. Off the top you descend into the Minger valley, running bush and river trails back out towards Arthur's Pass.

You go through stages on the mountain run of feeling fantastic and then feeling very low in energy; this is where it is vital to take on lots of fluid and food. You are out there for a number of hours and the tough terrain means you are

expending a lot of energy not just physically but also mentally, as any drop in concentration usually results in a fall onto some very hard rocks or into the very cold rivers. The handful of river crossings certainly helps keep you refreshed but many people suffer cramping due to the cold water. I was lucky in this regard.

As I Minger Valley opens up you can see the Klondyle rail bridge in the distance which is the indicator the end is in sight, this is a tough section of the course though as you still have a 4km run down the river bed until the end of day one. With tired legs and concentration low this is an easy section to have a fall. My friends, family and support crew including Scotty and Dan all drove up the river to a spot approx 2km from the finish to cheer me on, this was an awesome boost and made the last couple of km's quite enjoyable.

Coming up the shoot was awesome, apart from when they called out, here comes Sarah Nowell, from Australia... but don't worry I set them straight pretty quickly!!

Day one had taken me 6.53hr. I was coming in at 15th place for the women in the two day and 63rd place over all. I had passed 8 females on the mountain run stage and my only regret was not having pushed myself a little more on the first cycle and I finished both legs quite fresh. That all comes with practice though and becoming more aware of how much you can push yourself earlier in the race without blowing out later.

That night we stayed at a mates batch in Arthur's Pass - Showered and fed it was time to relax. That was until I got word that an emergency meeting was to be held for all competitors at Klondyke Corner at 6pm. The sun was shining and it had been a gorgeous day, but all that was to change. Forecasters were predicting 140mm of rain in nine hours from Midnight Friday, warning the rain could go to 45mm in one hour. The Waimak River could be expected to rise from 42 cumecs to 200 cumecs over night with the risk of flash floods. The weather caused changes in both the 2nd day of the two day race and altered the whole one day race.

With the Waimakariri River running dangerously high, the kayak was switched to a 20km kayak on the Avon River in Christchurch but first we had to cycle 145km from Klondyke Corner to Hagley Park, into a head-on easterly wind. I had to dig deep; while I had spent plenty of hours on the bike in training, 145km was not something I had trained for, especially following 7 hours on my legs the day before. I was lucky and got into some pretty good bunches and managed to do the cycle in 5.03hrs which I was stoked with as we had to climb Flock Hill and Porters Pass which are very steep accents and scary downhill descents with the wind the way it was.

Hitting Christchurch on the bike was awesome, EVERYONE was out on the streets cheering you on and the police were fantastic stopping all traffic as we flew through town. The kayak transition was carnage as due to the late changes in the course support crews had not practiced it and were not totally certain of their approach once their competitor came in. The banks of the Avon are steep and slippery and in my rush to get to my boat I flew straight over the side and did a head first bomb into the river... one way to cool off and provide the crowd with a good laugh!

20km of weed, rocks and a head on wind later and I was out of the kayak - 20km I would rather not mention, give me white water any day! On to my bike for the final 10km ride into Sumner beach to be greeted with a cold can of Speight's!!!



I came into Sumner in 14.56.49, 19th women in the two day event. We had a very strong women's field this year which is awesome for women's multisport. 20 women in the top 80 out of 275 competitors.

What now? Well I am writing this from my family farm in Kurow, NZ and the week has consisted of catching up with friends and family and having a few (plus a few more) well deserved glasses of wine. Would I do it again? Totally, an awesome race in a beautiful part of NZ. Check it out for yourself coasttocoast.co.nz.