



Kathmandu®

# COAST TO COAST

WORLD MULTI-SPORT CHAMPIONSHIPS

RACING FROM ONE SIDE OF A COUNTRY TO THE OTHER



A lot of staff have commented about my commitment to exercise, particularly riding my bike to work from Traralgon South (only a couple of times a week). Well as much as I enjoy being active, there is nothing like a big goal looming on the horizon to keep you focused and motivated. In December I decided it was time to finally tick the box for one of the most famous events on the world adventure sport calendar- The Coast to Coast Multisport race in New Zealand. In 1982 a small group of 11 athletes first tried the course from Kumara on the West coast of the South Island to Christchurch on the East coast taking 2 days to complete the 243km of running, road cycling and white water kayaking. The event has grown to now have several thousand competitors mostly competing in the two day event in teams. But I was one of 150 athletes attempting the race in one day and the event is now known as "The Longest Day" and is the World Multisport Championships.

I flew to Christchurch on the Thursday, two days prior to the event. In that time I needed to pick up a kayak and try to set it up correctly to suit my size, needs etc. Borrow a car from a friend. Buy food. Collect my dad who was my support crew from the airport at 1am (not ideal), drive 3hours to the race briefing, register, have a gear check, bike check, build my bike which I took with me on the plane, get all my gear and food for 13+ hours of racing and try and get some sleep before a 3.50am alarm. Fortunately I'm well and truly used to being disorganised before a race and that doesn't even fluster me anymore.

The race starts with a short 2.2km run from the beach front at 6am. It is not even light yet. The pace from the start is quicker than anything I've done in a long time as I try to keep up and get on my bike near the leaders. I missed the first bunch of 12 guys to ride off into the distance (not that I can see them in the darkness).





The 55km bike ride heads up a pretty valley and as the sun comes up there are great views of the surrounding hills. At the transition I head out on the 30km mountain run. This leg gives off road running a new meaning. It is a true "Pick-your-own-Adventure" with the route going up one river valley, over a mountain pass and then down the next valley. There are sections on small trails but large sections of boulder hopping, thigh high cold river crossings and many places where I couldn't see another competitor or any sign of where to go. But I while my legs were already tired from pushing hard on the first run and bike, I really enjoyed this run.

Coming to the end of the run I had double leg cramps climbing out of one of the river crossings and I literally used my fingernails to pull myself up the other side and slowly jogged the last few kilometres. It was a great feeling finishing the run, and found out I was in 11th place, and hopping back on the bike. This is a short 15km ride with more amazing views and a chance to eat some solid food before the long kayaking leg.

The 70km kayak is generally the deciding leg of the event and competitors either love it or loathe it. Unlike most of my competitors that had been training on the course over summer, I had never been down the river. It has a 30km gorge with no escape so once you start you are committed to keep going. I was quickly passed by the leading women, a champion paddler from South Africa and tried hard to stick with her.

Once she was out of sight I tried to enjoy the experience and was more comfortable than I expected. Several years of kayaking training in Gippsland rivers like the Thomson, Macalister and Mitchell are great for building the skills to be able to succeed in this race. I spent the last two hours of this leg pushing hard to stay with two guys who had caught up to me and I was happy to finish the kayak still feeling ok after 4hrs 40mins in the boat. That is a long time to sit on a hard cramped seat!

The final leg is a 70 road ride to finish on the beach at New Brighton. Famous for its head wind, this year did not disappoint, and I'm very thankful for all the roadside hedges. I felt good as soon as I got pedalling and quickly passed a few guys and kept up a good speed. After about an hour I caught back up to the first women and then was surprised with about 15km to go when I caught another South African. This then did put me into 10th place. With just a few km to go I missed a turn and suddenly didn't know where I was going with no signs in site. Luckily a car with some support crews drove past and pointed me back towards the beach and back on track.

I reached the finish line in 12hrs 37mins and 10th place. I was really happy with my result and made the hard work all worthwhile. I did think this would be a one off attempt at Coast to Coast, but by the time I was hopping of the plane home on Sunday night I was definitely planning a new and improved approach for 2019. Racing in New Zealand is very addictive, especially when the sun is shining.

