

TWO THEORIES ABOUT THE SPEIGHT'S COAST TO COAST

(or, If you do it too much, you'll go blind)

ROB GREENAWAY reports on the 1996 Speight's Coast to Coast.

Ross Capill's physique always tempts me to ask, "Are you really having fun, Ross?" He's kind of big for his bones and would make someone a fine Uncle, but here he was sitting in a plastic deckchair at Klondyke

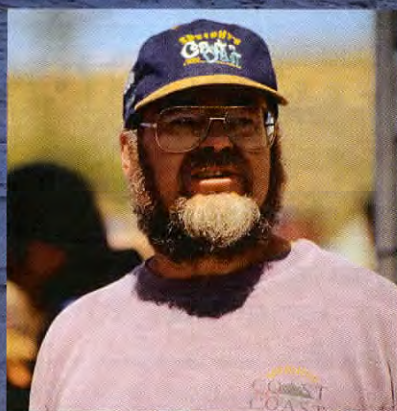
Corner, eating pasta and feeding the sandflies. If Steve Gurney is a bio-mechanical misfit — as he admits — then he and Ross have at least one thing in common. "I'm having more fun than at least two other people,"

Ross replied.

"And who would they be?"

"Bugged if I know, but one's still out there."

Ross's strengths are in activities that require being seated. Fortunately this includes cycling and kayaking, but excludes running. "I had cramp in both legs virtually full-time going over the Mingha, and resigned myself to eight hours of brisk walking. But I'm looking forward to tomorrow. I can hold my own on a bike and I'm



Race Director Robin Judkins

Photo: Rob Greenaway



Photo: Gareth Eyres / Exposure

**SPEIGHT'S
COAST TO COAST**
THE MOUNTAIN RACE

not a bad paddler—but don't quote me on this till I'm finished. I'm just looking forward to a traditional dip of the toes in the sea at Sumner."

Ross did finish well. He had a strong paddle and held his own on the bike, despite the traditional headwind on the final cycle into Christchurch. He did dip his toes at Sumner, although he didn't lie down in the sea as he had at a beach in Wanganui at the end of the 1994 Mountains to Sea.

At the Mountains to Sea that year he stated that he had achieved his goals at that event, competing as an individual, coming last, being satisfied with his achievement, with no need to compete solo again. His next goal at that stage

was Speight's Coast to Coast. Despite the Coast to Coast being the final multisport goal that Ross had spoken of, I was a little shocked to hear him say, "Yes, this will be my last event. For a while."

Psychologically, the guy is very well balanced. For all I know he may pull the wings off butterflies in his spare time, but to have been involved in multisport and triathlon for over half a decade and to speak of retiring while at his physical peak speaks of something special.

Why? Well, besides reaching a state of emotional maturity that makes Ross one of the nicest people to meet (although I don't know why he hangs around with such a stropky support crew), he's not yet as scrawny as Doug

Photo: Gareth Eyres / Exposur



Photo: Chris McLennan

SPEIGHT'S COAST TO COAST

THE MOUNTAIN RACE



Lomax. Doug used to be 15 1/2 stone. He's done the event 12 times—now promoted to veteran status. If you're going to ask anyone on the Speight's Coast to Coast why they do it, you may as well ask Doug.

"Doug," I asked, "why do you keep doing this event?"

"Well," he replied, wiping the stinging sweat from his eyes, focusing on the middle distance (around the tip of his nose) and adopting a thoughtful expression, "Buggered if I know."

Those words, spoken by a man who knows, clinched two theories about the Speight's Coast to Coast that I'd intended to test on the likes of Ross and Doug and as many of the 770-odd competitors as I could reach.

Theory number one is that if you do it too much you go blind—blind to the rationale behind doing it. Theory number two is that for a majority of competitors (nay, participants) the Speight's Coast to Coast has little to do with multisport. In fact, once the fastest 30 are across the line, you're pretty much left with a string of finishers who know diddly squat about multisport. What they know about is the Coast to Coast. Ask them what happens at the Tuatapere Wild Challenge and they'll suggest something to do with sausages. If you're into sticking flyers for other multisport events under the wipers of the cars parked at the finish of the Speight's Coast to Coast, then you're probably wasting a lot of paper. This one event is all there is.

Take Richard and Natalie Baird—twins they say, although she's 22 and he's 24 and they competed as a mixed family team. "Are you guys multisporters?" I asked, while Natalie pushed the last few rings of courgette and tomato paste around her plate at the end of day one.

Simultaneously they replied, "Naaa," and began to debate whether Richard volunteered to compete to save Natalie the agony of doing it alone. Richard thinks he didn't volunteer, but wasn't very convincing and swore he would never do it as an individual. Natalie wasn't so sure.

"It's The Event, isn't it. If you're doing the whole thing as an individual then you've achieved The Event," she said.

How about Stewart Martel, a Wellingtonian for the time being—like many Wellingtonians. He spent a year getting into shape for the race—a shape that his partner Sandy is very pleased about. But why did he really run across the Southern Alps?

"It was a dare in the pub, actually. And no, I'm not doing it again."

There's Robin Rutter at the end of day one in 75th place in the open men's team division. While writing his name down I thought "I bet he got a hard time at school, with a name like that", but then his fiancée Ulrike Koehler chipped in, "Write down 'Nutter'. No one will recognise him otherwise." That wasn't what I had in



mind.
"How much training did you do for this, Robin?"

"None," he replied. "No, honestly.

We're getting married next weekend. My best man's fiancée had to pull out last week and I'm here in her place. I got a boat on Tuesday, a bit of sponsorship f r o m

Nightingale Garage Doors, a new tyre for the bike on Wednesday and here we are."

With no training, Rutter and his mate Keith Jacques were the 142nd team home.

Graeme Waghorn had a little note written on his kayak by his support crew—something

about ten dollars. He was there doing "The Race" with "a few of "The Boys." As an incentive, The Boys' support crews had all chipped in ten dollars each, leaving \$100 in the prize pool. The winning support team got the lot. But Graeme had another bet on the side.

"If I beat Sue Olaman and Nancy Olaman [racing as a two person team] by more than one hour forty, they buy me any meal I want. If I don't, I have to buy them as much as they can drink.

"And if they get that close to me, they'll be so shattered they won't be able to drink much."

Little did he know, Nancy and Sue had not only been training for the Speight's Coast to Coast, they'd done a fair amount of drinking training too.

"There's something about the Coast to Coast," one of them said. "If you're cycling,

other riders invite you to join their bunch. If you're on the run and slip, someone will ask if you're okay. It's fun. It's special."

Graeme Causer is probably saying the same thing after Steve Gurney stopped for 20 minutes on the one-day event to keep him company before he was airlifted from the Mingha to hospital. Gurney blew away any chances of making the top five, but still got his photo on the cover of The Press. The Speight's Coast to Coast is not about multisport, and here's the proof. I can quote a handful of experienced multisporters who describe Speight's Coast to Coast as having an inferior course to, for example, the Mountains to Sea. And yet, the Coast to Coast got over 1200 applications for the 1996 race—nearly twice the event's capacity. The Mountains to Sea gets just enough to fill the available places. Dozens of other events struggle to get numbers. Steve Harvey, for example. He's done the event ten times and regularly places in the top ranks. This year he took it easy in the open teams event, placing third with Dai Richards from Wales. "The course is very attractive," he reckons, "but not as good as



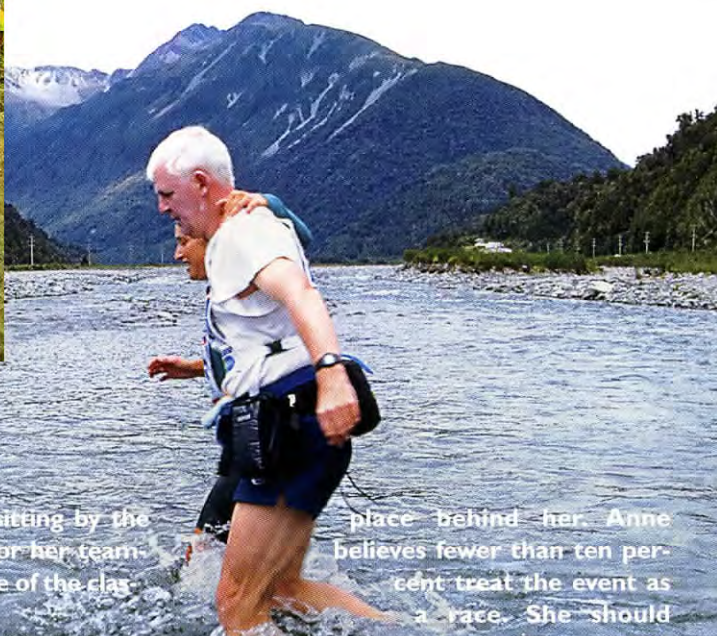
How many helping hands does a man need?
Alister Ryan, Wellington

some other events. The terrain is far from the best. The Mountains to Sea has better terrain. It's the concept that's got the big following." "Just about anyone can accomplish the race, although it's very challenging mentally, and to be competitive on the mountain run you do have to be exceptional. One other thing: there are few events that are this well organised. Everyone knows where they stand.





GRAEME CAUSER on his way to a waiting helicopter for the ride to hospital.



It's very predictable. You know how to prepare, and you know the rules."

So why do it, Steve? "I can't imagine having the Coast to Coast on and not doing it. I can't imagine not being fit. I'd get grumpy and my wife would kick me out of the house."

Penny Webster has a history of top places in any event you'd care to name, including expeditions like the Grand Traverse and the Southern Traverse which are her favourite types of exercise. This year, she's off to do the Eco-Challenge (a Grand Traverse copyright buster) in British Colombia, having got her youngest child to 2 1/4 years old.

"If you want to be good, you come to

this event," she said, sitting by the Waimakariri waiting for her team-mate to arrive. "It's one of the classics."

Because of the course? I asked.

"Not really. It's more the field. No other event has this quality of competitors. It's the most well-known, and has the organisation. But on the other side, something like the two day teams event is very achievable by Mr Average. And it's easy to build your way from there." Penny described herself as 'keeping her interest up to come back later.'

Which will provide just the right competition for the likes of Anne Woodley, now that she has a first

place behind her. Anne believes fewer than ten percent treat the event as a race. She should

know. The 1996

Speight's Coast to

Coast broke her long-standing record of coming second in the two big events on the multisport calendar and being titled the "bridesmaid" of the activity.

"I treat most things as a competition," she said under the finish banner. "I treat carparking as a competition. But for lots of entrants the Coast to Coast is about mana. It's very do-able; very achievable; very thinkable." For Anne, the event means getting up too early in the morning, get-

ERIC THOMPSON of Alexandra hits the finish line



Photo: Rob Greenaway

SPEIGHT'S COAST TO COAST

THE MOUNTAIN RACE



ting nervous and throwing up. "But hey, you have to suffer to be beautiful," she rationalises. "And after a few years of racing injuries, I can now finish a race and get up by myself afterwards."

What does all that mean? Well, probably that the people who write marketing books are right. Be first—on the button. Get a good name—no worries there. Get a public profile—after 14 years, it's as well known as marmite. Create a culture—mission complete, almost. Be all things to all people—only if you want to fail. The Speight's Coast to Coast is only two things: The Race and The Adventure.

The result? Speight's beer has 70% of the market share in Otago and Southland, and is now biting

into the Auckland market.

But let's not get cynical. There's a magical moment at every turn.

Remember Stewart Martel? The man in Sandy's favourite shape? "It's about setting a goal and doing it," he believes. "Sure, anyone can do it, but it might take them an awful long time. It's about satisfaction. I thought it was too hard, but I did it for me. Sure, in a few weeks it might be a social status thing. I dabbled my toes in the Tasman at the start and I went over the mountain."

"And you dabbled them in the Pacific at the finish?" I asked.

"No. I forgot."

I rest my case.



JOHN GILLIES
from Dunedin,
75yrs young
and still going
strong



NEIL JONES,
winner of the
Longest
Day

RESULTS

LONGEST DAY

OPEN

1. Neil Jones, Whakatane 11:49:39;
2. Andy Macbeth, Hokitika, 11:53:23;
3. Eric Billoud, Queenstown, 12:03:59.

WOMEN

1. Kathy Lynch, Motueka, 13:16:58;
2. Kristina Strode Penny, Dunedin, 13:50:50;
3. Genene Cook, Whakatane, 14:19:12.

TWO DAY

OPEN

1. Michael Causer, Chch, 11:30:21;
2. Tim Abbott, Chch, 11:53:43;
3. Simon Yarrell, Chch, 11:54:48.

WOMEN

1. Anne Woodley, Chch, 13:16:18;
2. Nic Kelly, Kurow, 13:43:48;
3. Jane Moulder, Wgtn, 13:57:40.

TEAMS:

OPEN

1. Hamish Hamilton, David Maitland, 11:08:31;
2. Alastair Snowdon, Simon Callaghan, 11:17:06;
3. Steve Harvey, Dai Richards, 11:44:20.

WOMEN

1. Monica Barclay, Alison Draine, 13:17:19;
2. Shona Brett, Kerryn O'Leary, 13:22:24;
3. Sarah Wilson, Sarah McCrae, 13:40:31.

SIDEBAR

The Bennachie Scotch Whisky Coast to Coast will be held 29 Aug-1 Sept. Entries close 31 July. Entry forms can be obtained by sending a stamped sae to NZ Adventure, PO Box 7035, Sydenham, Christchurch. Further details on the Scottish Coast to Coast in Event Calendar.