

SPRING FLUSH SPEEDS EMPTY SEERS

by Rob Greenaway

Mount Pinotubo has a lot to answer for, if the bespectacled shiney-bums of the weather office have the story right. Up until this year the weather for the Lifespan Mountains to Sea events has followed a very set pattern.

Fine on day one. Last year the start time was even moved forward half an hour to take advantage of the sun that would strike the Whakapapa skifield at 7.30am with a high level of predictability. The same level of predictability that goes

with Mark Trotman of Palmerston North being in the winning men's team, or perhaps individual Anne Woodley from Wellington coming in second.

Overcast on day two. Perfect conditions for paddling 87-km. And drizzling on day three. Great for a 31-km marathon.

But after dumping on the Coast to Coast, Mount Pinotubo — if that's what's to blame — blotted out the sun for the first day of the Lifespan Mountains to Sea.

The first section was 'marginal', according to Race

Director Dave Bamford. Temperatures at Iwikau dived below comfort level, while the height of the Whakapapaiti River rose well above it.

'If we could get a rope across the Whakapapaiti then perhaps we could get the runners through. And if they didn't get too cold at the start line, if they had a chance to warm up and keep warm before the start, then there would be a good chance we could get away without any hypothermia cases.' Bamford, safety coordinator Sue Webb and the Department of Conservation's



Wanganui Gorge. Full, dark, mysterious.
Photo: Gareth Eyres

Paul Green ran through a list of 'ifs' and 'perhaps's' on the morning of day one.

Bamford and Green had placed a handy rope across one section on chest-deep snow below Scoria Flat the night before. It was the first time the white, crunchy stuff had survived winter and the television crews were looking forward to some good shots of wallowing competitors — the slower they move the easier it would be to get good footage.

The media potential of the weather might have been great but the risks were too high. The decision was easily made and the start moved from the horizontal sleet at Iwikau to the water-logged golf course below Whakapapa Village. It was a move that disappointed the likes of mountain-man Steve Gurney, but the vast majority heaved a collective sigh of relief as they gathered in the Chateau on the Saturday of Labour Weekend — a wet, warm

and slightly nervous crowd. They still had the surging Whanganui River to contend with. It waited, in flood, brown and swift, but without any mobile strainers or bobbing cattle. MTS'ers were likely to be flushed down the river at speed, in the same manner as Taumaranui's sewage.

Paul Coles of Lower Hutt led the individual men out of the mud and unanticipated streams which pock marked the 23-km of marshy terrain. His first run took its toll as 11 cyclists overtook him in the 61-km cycle through Taumaranui to Ohinepa. One of those was Steve Gurney, in the event for the first time. Nelson's Jeff Mitchell was somewhere behind Gurney, who, after his third placing behind Mitchell in this year's Coast to Coast, had something of a point to prove.

Mitchell had proved race commentator Arthur Klap right when Klap predicted that many runners under-estimate the severity

of the first run section. 'There are runners who come to the race thinking that they're going to go well, and the first run destroys them.' Well, not quite — Mitchell had plenty of energy in reserve despite dropping 16 places before hitting the cycle, ultimately finishing day one in sixth place, one spot behind Bob Foster of Christchurch who was leading the vet's division. It didn't look good for the recognised rival.

Gurney had an almost predictable 14 minutes on Paul Coles by the time they reached Whakahoro. 'There's two sections to the solo men's division,' suggests Coles. 'The professional and the amateur. I'm in the amateur division. Gurney's out there by himself.'

A similar game was panning out with the individual women. Anne Woodley had arrived at the event with first place as her target. In the past year she's made a string of impressive seconds — 1991





Paul Cossens samples the splurge on the Mountain.
Photo: Gareth Eyres

(Jan') Lifespan Mountains to Sea, 1992 Smokefree Head to Head and 1992 Speights Coast to Coast. Linda Wensley of Blenheim was one step ahead of her at Head to Head but this was Wensley's first attempt at the Lifespan event.

Tactics for Woodley were to keep her times up in running and cycling and avoid a swim in the kayak. Wensley's paddling skills gave her a distinct advantage and as paddling is the races backbone, she had an excellent chance of establishing a good lead on the water — if she could avoid any technical hitches.

Drafting on the water left a big black spot on the sensitive new age image of the Lifespan Mountains to Sea in 1992. Organisers have always touted the race as a journey, as much as it is a race. The idea is for participants and competitors to set individual goals, meet them **and** have a good time — even if there is about \$50,000 worth of toys and travel with Cathay Pacific for competitors who have a good time faster than anyone else. Too much of a temptation perhaps. The result last

year was a rash of wash-hangers in the second day's 87-km paddle. Not so much amongst the top paddlers, but in the 5th to 20th placed racers.

Draconian measures were needed to put a halt to the problem once and for all. Despite there being several phone calls in the week prior to the race to Tourism Resource Consultants — the organisers — by pro-drafting kayakers, Dave Bamford described the bottom line at the race briefings.

'We've had enough of cheats. Throughout the paddling sections there will be draft busters in abundance. Some will look like competitors and have race bibs, others will be in the media, some will be concealed on the river banks. Each time you're caught you'll receive a 20 minute penalty. Once you've got a few of those, you're out of the race and probably out of the event for good,' warned Bamford.

Heavy stuff, but as it turned out, not called to action. No drafters spotted, although a megaphoned draft buster gave at

least one kayaker a rev-up for dropping rubbish in the water.

Were competitors just following the rules because they were so authoritarian, or did they agree with them? The after-race survey, filled in by over 300 participants, illustrated an overwhelming 97% level of support for the ruling. 'Stick with the large time penalties — that's the way to deter the bludgers,' was a general comment.

But rather than having to deter wash hangers, paddlers had to contend with flood-level eddy lines and heavy-duty roller coasters at river confluences. Approximately one third of the field swam at one stage on the second day. While Gurney described the five hour paddle as, 'mind-numbingly boring,' most of the field found it sufficiently exciting. At speeds of up to 19-km/hr, compared with the averages of 13-km/hr last year, concentration was paramount and times were reduced from last year by up to two hours. Mike Bassett set a course record on the water with a time of 4 hours, 49 minutes.

As one of the race organisers, a lesson was learnt. It's fine requiring paddling certificates from kayakers to ensure some degree of white water proficiency for safety and indemnity reasons (the Lifespan Mountains to Sea doesn't), but it seldom proves much. Being able to roll a Dancer with one's eyelashes just doesn't wash when most racers choose the kayakers' equivalent of a unicycle to speed through the heavy water on race day. Get a boat that matches your level of skill — not your target time — and enjoy the paddle and not the swim.

Linda Wensley's skills in the kayak were sufficiently strong to put her just over 30 minutes ahead of Anne Woodley at the end of day two, and that time included an unscheduled stop to repair an ornery rudder system. Woodley had picked an Eliminator for the race, hoping that the river would be high enough to shorten the kayak section, and minimise her expected deficit. The very stable boat kept her dry and reasonably happy. Linda-May Retemeyer posted an excellent kayak time,



Linda Wensley is all concentration on the river.
Photo: Gareth Eyres

finishing less than three minutes behind Wensley and confirming her third placing. Wensley cruised through with the customary smile and a time of 5 hours 41 minutes.

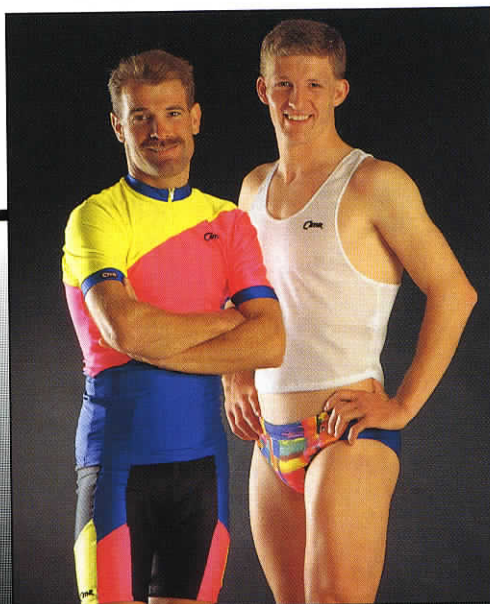
Meanwhile Jeff Mitchell took out line honours on day two for the solo men — a habit he kept for the final stretch in day three. But it didn't make a great deal of difference to Gurney. He gained a good lead on day one and Mitchell's poor first run gave Gurney some good breathing space. Paul Coles continued to post excellent times in day three's 30-km run and 54-km cycle but lost 20 minutes on the water — a gap he couldn't regain.

Woodley piled on the pace for day three. Coming second — again — was almost inevitable, but that wasn't any reason to relax. A powerful run and cycle nibbled 11 minutes off Wensley's lead, which amounted to 18 minutes by the time they reached Castlecliff Beach and the sea. Wensley on the water — and elsewhere — is clearly a force to be reckoned with.

Bob Foster of Christchurch was the man of the moment in the veteran men's section. Gaining first

place in his division looked like an easy feat, with over an hour between Foster and second placed Rod Sutherland at the finish. Having only just reached the vet's category at 40 years of age gives Foster an excuse for gaining the fifth fastest time overall, putting him two places ahead of Rotorua's Paul Cossens, winner of the 1991 event.

The most spirited effort has to be assigned to a mixed team titled 'Blind Faith'. Maire Gedye, a fifty year old telephonist from Auckland, joined Derek Ferigo earlier in the year to see how they would go in a cooperative effort. Ferigo broke his leg while training on the bush tracks of the Waitakere Ranges and called in Terry Newlands to take over the running sections. Gedye's lack of sight meant she and Ferigo went the distance on a tandem bike and boat, eventually gaining second place, 28 minutes behind the Mainland Tourists — Murray Newman, Dave Anderson and Maria Hassan of Christchurch. Gedye's effort on the eve of Braille



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Week, left a major sense of inspiration at the event's prizegiving.

The Haemagoblins — a Turangi-Wellington mix of Tania Pearce, Jo Holden and Gabi Loose — looked like they had the women's teams sewn up from the word go. Pearce established a quick and easy lead in the first run and

the team maintained that lead through until day three. But Pearce's first effort cost the team dearly, and injury prevented her from maintaining the team's lead with her running skills in the fifth race section from Pipiriki to Koriniti. A quick substitution from within the team got them through to the finish line, but at the cost of

two places. The Volcanic Hazards — Lyn Fuggle, Prue Grant and Marlene Woods from Mount Ruapehu — gained first, and \$6,000 of travel, followed by Camera House Challenge — Alison Hall, Cathy Lovell and Sandy Fletcher from New Plymouth.

The winning men's team was as predictable as winter. Auckland's Mark Trotman had joined Mike Bassett and David Dulpan, both from Palmerston North. Trotman has been in the winning team for every Lifespan Mountains to Sea and Bassett has been in two. They posted a record time of 13 hours 3 minutes, compared to last year's time for Trotman's team of 14 hours 57 minutes. **NZ▲**

RESULTS

MEN

DAY ONE

Name	Run 23km	Cycle 61km	Kayak 35km	Day One Total
Steve Gurney	1:55:46 5	1:30:02 1	2:00:29 1	5:26:17 1
Jeff Mitchell	2:09:35 16	1:31:42 2	2:02:23 2	5:43:40 6
Paul Coles	1:51:56 1	1:41:49 12	2:06:15 4	5:40:00 2
Tony Sherratt	2:11:22 20	1:36:06 4	2:07:08 5	5:54:36 7
Scott Lowry	1:57:14 6	1:38:58 9=	2:07:13 6	5:43:25 5

DAY TWO

	Kayak 35km	Day Two
Steve Gurney	5:03:37 2	10:29:54 1
Jeff Mitchell	5:00:56 1	10:44:36 2
Paul Coles	5:21:49 5	11:01:49 3
Tony Sherratt	5:14:45 4	11:09:21 4
Scott Lowry	5:33:14 11	11:16:39 6

DAY THREE

	Run 23km	Cycle 61km	Day Three
Steve Gurney	1:55:53 3	1:43:33 3	3:39:26 2
Jeff Mitchell	1:55:51 2	1:42:06 1	3:37:57 1
Paul Coles	1:54:32 1	1:48:26 6	3:42:58 3
Tony Sherratt	2:12:22 16	1:43:28 2	3:55:50 8
Scott Lowry	2:08:21 12	1:46:56 4	3:55:17 6

OVERALL

Steve Gurney	14:09:20
Jeff Mitchell	14:22:33
Paul Coles	14:44:47
Tony Sherratt	15:05:11
Scott Lowry	15:11:56

WOMEN

DAY ONE

Name	Run 23km	Cycle 61km	Kayak 35km	Day One Total
Linda Wensley	2:17:26 27	1:49:35 26	2:09:14 8	6:16:15 19
Anne Woodley	2:16:54 25	1:53:24 36	2:23:45 31	6:34:03 26
L Retemeyer	2:57:07 62	1:50:13 27	2:19:40 24	7:07:00 41

DAY TWO

	Kayak 87km	End Day Two
Linda Wensley	5:41:51 17	11:58:06 16
Anne Woodley	5:55:29 32	12:29:32 26
L Retemeyer	5:44:31 24	12:51:31 35

DAY THREE

	Run 30km	Cycle 54km	Day Three
Linda Wensley	2:25:26 33	2:09:59 38	4:35:25 31
Anne Woodley	2:18:09 26	2:03:50 26	4:21:59 23

OVERALL

Linda Wensley	16:33:31
Anne Woodley	16:51:31
L Retemeyer	18:07:53

RESULTS Cont'd

Veteran Men

1. Bob Foster	15.09.28
2. Rod Sutherland	16.12.54
3. Bill Crawley	16.13.40
4. Brent Harrison	16.59.48

Veteran Women

1. Margaret Glentworth	20.20.22
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Team Schools

1. Taumarunui	15.07.42
2. Western Heights	15.50.46
3. Feilding Ag	16.15.30

Team Women

1. Volcanic Hazards	15.47.48
2. Camera House	16.06.23
3. The Haemagoblins	16.09.17

Team Men

1. No Worries	13.03.54
2. The Gorbachevs	13.33.51
3. Cheers	13.37.16

Team Mixed

1. Mainland Tourist	14.36.07
2. Blind Faith	15.04.15
3. Gone Trucking	15.37.07

Team Corporate

1. FRI Fliers	14.24.55
2. Cargill NZ Ltd	14.33.03
3. PWF (Wanganui)	15.19.30

Team Vet Men

1. Old Mans Beard	14.28.02
2. Moustachio Bros	15.00.44
3. The Krazies	15.11.19