

# Lake to Lighthouse 2011

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Well it's no secret it has been a busy few months of racing and the Lake to Lighthouse was a bit of change of scene after mainly 2-4 hour races.

I've also been super busy launching a new company called Flow kayaks, which I formed with Andrew Martin. Andrew has made my race boats for years and has also been one of the major contributors to improving my paddling since moving to Nelson nearly 7 years ago. In the past few weeks we finally saw the plans go from the computer to the water but it definitely took a major toll on the training leading into this particular race.

We literally finished the first boat, which Elina would be paddling, on the Thursday morning about an hour before we had to leave for the ferry. Elina got 5 minutes in it to make sure it floated before we had to scarp to make the ferry. We were in Picton not more than 5 minutes before we drove onto the ferry – good timing!

## ***Day 1 - Waikaremoana***

If there was a single day of racing on our calendar this year which I was dreading it was this one. It isn't that it is a bad course, far from it, but after racing and training for events no longer than 4 hours to be faced with a 5+ hour run as just one section of the day I knew there was the potential for disaster.

The day started with a grind on the MTB's up the gravel road from Tuai to the main lake, before we followed the undulating track around to transition 1 at Home Bay.

I had company this year with Trevor Voyce and team cyclist John Gray and we all raced into the TA together.

Onto the paddle and I quickly tried to get the jump on Trev, I figured any extra time I had at the start of the run would be a good thing and as I chased down Sam Clark from the first team I managed a small gap. Sam and I battled it out throughout the kayak leg and arrived with a couple of minutes over Trevor.

It sounds as though we got through before the wind started coming up but further back in the field there was apparently plenty of action including a few swimming lessons.

Onto the run and I was freezing cold for the first 30 or 40 minutes, the southerly was certainly keeping the temperature down.

I was feeling pretty comfortable, I could see Sam Clark close behind for the first hour or so before he gradually slipped back. It wasn't long though before I caught sight of Trev not far behind. It was almost exactly 2 hours in and although I had hoped I'd make it to the hill before he caught up we weren't too far from the transition.

I picked up the pace a bit or Trev slowed up and we ran stride for stride to the end of the first section of the run.

Once loaded up with more drink, food we set off again, stride for stride. John Gray from the lead team had swapped his MTB for his running shoes and came flying past us both, oh to have fresh legs at that point!

I managed to up it a little and I was surprised to gap Trevor slightly. My dabble off the front ended soon after when I stepped out of my shoe running through some mud and Trev, who'd only be a few meters back anyway cruised on past. We soon hit the climb and I was thankful that the pace wasn't any harder than it was as I struggled up onto the top of the Panakeri range with Trev cruising along behind me. The body was definitely starting to suffer. It appeared that muscle memory was lacking for a run of this length and the 90-minute runs I'd been surviving on between races just weren't enough to have me firing for so long on the feet.

As we passed Panakeri Hut I grabbed some water from the aid station and as I did Trev bolted. I gulped down some water and bolted after him. I wasn't making much of an impression on his lead and he gradually slipped further and further ahead while I became aware my body was starting to have a pretty serious meltdown. There was less than 10km to go but the track was broken and covered in drops and roots requiring far more co-ordination than I was able muster by this stage and as a result I did several ungainly face plants.

The weather had also taken a turn for the worse with a massive hailstorm passing through and the temperature plummeted.

It was all I could do really to put one foot in front of the other for the remainder of the run, which for me was more like a painful hobble. I finally saw the transition below and mustered a jog the final flatter 500m to my waiting bike.

It was the greatest feeling once I got to the downhill and I could see the kilometers ticking off quickly with no effort on the part of my legs. I finally arrived back at the finish line in Tuai, utterly exhausted and defeated. When I arrived I was welcomed back by the most fearsome Haka I have ever seen, which I fully felt like I didn't deserve.

Trev had put almost 18 minutes into me in the last 10km and I realistically felt my race for first was over.

## **Day 2 - Tuai to Wairoa**

Over night I came to terms with the fact I was highly unlikely to win this race, after being so thoroughly destroyed yesterday it was easy to have lower expectations on myself but the closer it got to the race start the more I felt like to hell with it - lets see what I can do. More than anything I decided I had to go down swinging and to show all the people who showed so much support the first day and throughout each and every race we do just what I can do.

The race started and I went - from the gun as hard as I could. I looked back after 200m and I had a gap already. Team rider John Gray made it across the gap and the two of us disappeared up the road with a clear gap behind.

I was already getting pretty loose on the gravel downhill's, the thought briefly flashed across my mind that I was probably going to die in a bike accident of my own making today - I quickly dismissed the idea and dug even deeper.

As we hit the first major climb I dropped John and it was comforting to be out on my own, egging myself on like some deranged soul. The climb gets really steep and by the top I couldn't see anyone - I had already made up I guessed at least 2 minutes. The downhill's that followed I truly scared myself, the road was rutted and washed out from rain, as well as being extremely slippery in places there

were drops and holes that could easily break a bike, and a person it you plowed into them. Somehow I managed to keep the bike upright and was right back into hammering for every second I could.

The last climb is super steep, only just rideable and my legs were so thrashed by the top I thought maybe I'd overdone it, but I was in the right frame of mind well and truly now and it became a game to just see how much I could punish myself and keep pushing through.

Arriving at the TA I grabbed my TT bike and headed off up the hill, 400m up in 4km or thereabouts. My power meter was showing good numbers and the legs accustomed quickly to the change of position.

The downhill on the other side is a blast and I was regularly approaching 90kph. I still had no idea where Trev was in comparison to me so it was head down as I tried to blast my way to the next TA as fast as possible.

A few cars started passing me and some were yelling splits that I couldn't really hear over the noise of the wind through the helmet but everyone was looking pretty excited, maybe I was pulling back enough time to at least make it exciting. The other thing that was getting exciting was where was my support crew? I had only about 8km to go the kayak transition when they went whipping past – relief!

Into the kayak and more than half the day was done already. I was still feeling good but ultra aware that the kayak could be the make or break if it was getting close. I was disappointed to see there would be no assistance from the current today; the branches in the water indicating it must be nearly slack tide.

I keep concentrating on the process, ticking over, making sure the food was going in, checking the GPS for speed and digging for that little extra. It was empowering to be racing with such purpose instead of just going through the motions to get to the finish. Sam Clark from the top team was eating into my lead and by the time we reached the final TA he was right behind me. John once again took off like a cut cat while I tried to cox the body into one last effort.

After about 10 minutes of running the road joins the river and runs parallel to it, I hoped I would see Trev, which would mean the race, would be getting close.

Sure enough just as the river came into view so did Trevor. I'd been running 10 minutes 20 seconds, I figured he had about exactly that to the finish of the paddle meaning I now held a slim overall lead – it was all on

Knowing Trev would be at his best on the run gave me the determination to dig even a bit deeper. I made it up the main climb feeling good, the co-ordination on the rough tracks incomparably better than the previous day.

With 6 kilometers to go the track flattened a little and it was now a matter of letting loose until the finish.

The body was by now well and truly feeling the effects of the day off the front and yesterdays struggle added in for good measure. It became a struggle between the mind and body with the GPS the gauge on who was winning the battle. Before long I was breaking the final kilometers into 500m blocks just to make the task manageable.

Finally the finish came into view and this year there were no high 5's or smiles, it was full gas right through the tape to an almost instant collapse.

Now all I had to do was wait. In many ways I would have been content whichever way the result went, I'd had a great day and could have done no more, it was a

day I could be proud of and that was what I'd set out to do more than anything at the start of the day.

As the minutes ticked past 5 then 10 then 15 minutes the anticipation grew. Alan on the microphone started teasing the crowd, and me, that he could see the quad bike that would be filming Trevs last few steps, but still no one could see his imminent arrival. As the clock ticked past the 18-minute mark a weary satisfaction washed over me and a few short minutes Trev made it to the finish line. He'd obviously had a rough day and had left it all on the track also.

It was a great race from Trevor, it was by far the hardest I have been pushed in a Multisport race for a long time and made the racing that much more fun and the satisfaction was far greater as a result of such close competition.

In the women's race Elina was unstoppable, again and was right in the race for the 3<sup>rd</sup> step on the men's podium, just missing out by a few minutes on the final day. She gave the new "Rockstar" kayak a good workout and gave it the seal of approval (once she'd checked the kayak times!)

We had a fantastic weekend at the race again and with plenty of less extreme options becoming available as part of the weekend of racing hopefully the race will see greater numbers in 2012

A huge thanks to all our sponsors and supporters, there's just one last race this coming weekend in Lorne near Melbourne to decide the series of the Anaconda races before a few weeks of proper recovery. I'll be making some plans over that time on what the racing calendar will look like over the summer too.

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