

Race Reports

Upper Murray Challenge

By Phil Barrett

Khancoban, 2nd Oct, 06

Hi All,

Short:

38km MTB - 2:02:15 hr 13th
26m Paddle - 2:12:39hr 57th
25km Run - 2:27:48hr 14th
Overall - 6:42:42hr 23rd overall / 11th Open Male

<http://www.uppermurraychallenge.com.au/>



Jo & Phil Barrett

Long:

Well this was my first foray into multisport racing undertaking the entire event as I had always competed in these events (eg Mars Challenge) doing the run and ride legs within a team as I did not Kayak. Since becoming involved in the Mark Webber Challenge event (will be held in November 2006) I have had to learn to kayak and with Jo by my side she has taught me to kayak (with Liam) and I have become proficient enough to paddle a TK1. So I thought that I should attempt the full race this time around and put my new found kayaking skills to the test. (My skills were not that advanced as witnessed by my having fallen in the Yarra on the Friday prior to the race at the Bourke Rd rapids. For anyone who knows them they are pretty lame rapids too)

Jo also joined me in the individual challenge as did a colleague Mark from Telstra. We headed off after much drama with the kayak cradle (welds breaking and having to source another set of roof racks at very late notice was a challenge in itself and led to a very late night! Thanks Rae and Alex!!) early on Saturday morning for the 5 hour drive to Khancoban. The drive takes you up north along the Hume to Wodonga and then east to the upper reaches of the Murray river with Mt Kosciusko in the background. It was a beautiful place to race. We were lucky enough to stay at the Khancoban Station property which was a very upmarket establishment and through which the MTB course ran.

On the Saturday afternoon we rode some of the MTB course and noticed how long and steep the climbs were... That gave Jo and I an indication of how hard the race was to be... I had not envisaged it being as challenging as it was...

Sunday morning came along and the weather was sensational - 27 degrees. We had our support crew Nic (with her boyfriend Pete) who had come up from Melbourne to support Jo and I and without who we could not have completed the race. She was sensational! The race commenced at 7:00am outside the Khancoban general store and we raced along the road and then took a sharp right up high into the hills above the golf course. The first 10km were a mixture of killer hills and nice sharp descents. Following the loop above the town we headed out along the airstrip to Khancoban Station where some really tough climbs and descents eschewed. With 5km to go along the river plain I hit a massive wombat hole and managed to brake a spoke, buckle my back wheel and throw myself to the ground! I was able to disable the back v brake and managed to cycle to the finish with the wheel rubbing against the frame and losing pressure!! Not good for the bike and I am picking up my new wheel from the bike shop today!! The perils of MTB racing are the amount of cash you churn through!! But it is great fun! The entire MTB course was unforgiving and when you were not climbing or descending you were riding across paddocks which were covered in grass about 10cm high! Really unforgiving stuff but great fun..

So it was off the bike in reasonable time and into the kayak for my first official kayak race! I was pretty nervous at the prospect of kayaking down the rapids as the Snowy Hydro company is a race sponsor and was letting out quite a flow of water into the Swampy Plains river to make it fast! Jo and I were paddling TK1's without skirts which are great for flat water but not so great for turbulent fast flowing water!! Needless to say it was an interesting experience. I took off trying to look confident and came upon the first big rapid only to take the wrong line and get turned around in the eddy adjacent to the rapids facing upstream. I somehow managed to stay upright and just turned the nose of the kayak into the fast flow and it took me around and down the rapid! So I managed to get through very unconventionally but upright... I also saw Jo heading to the transition on the bike and that cheered me up to see her doing so well. This occurred several more times as I went down the river but I managed to stay upright, though I did take on a considerable amount of water and had to stop to empty the boat once. After about 7km I came across the last big rapid and I had some other craft around me so took the wrong line and went in!! The water was very cold, but I was near a bank and so was easily able to get the boat ashore and on my way again pretty quickly... After that I managed to paddle the entire way without any more dramas which I was very pleased about.... So all in all a successful first foray in a boat which was not suited to the race at all! I did not see any other TK1's without skirts in the race so experience obviously helps!

Out of the kayak and onto the run... Getting your land legs is an interesting sensation after you exit the boat and I took my time in transition to ensure they were working correctly before I took off on the run... You look pretty silly wobbling around if you take off too quickly... The first 7km are up hill on a winding gravel road.. It was after this that we hit the steep ascent up Mt Elliot. It was about 30min of scrambling vertically up a gully to the top of the ridge.. A very tiring experience. I managed to keep going pretty well on the run and ran past many other competitors across the top of the mountain. We then had a fast descent off the top down to possibly the cruellest part of the race the



final 6km into the finish, as you approach this 6km it looks like a road which is reaching for the sky... You have to run in the blazing sun up a very large hill to get to within 1km of the finish and it is punishing after the 6 odd hours of competition to that time and the fact that you have clambered over the top of Mt Elliot!!! I was at this point closing in on a friend and fellow competitor Paul Simpson, but he had too much for me over the top of the hill and coasted ahead of me to the line by 1min.

Overall it was a very challenging event and for me great preparation for the Mark Webber Challenge. It was really sensational and I was extremely proud to have my wife Jo racing along side of me (I think the only husband and wife individual competitors in the race) and also the support of Nic who assisted us so ably all day!! Jo who had major dramas on the kayak leg and my colleague Mark did really well.

(Note: Jo will send through her own race report as it involves a unique day at the races ☺)

Exhausted, we then hit the road for the 5 hour drive home managing to not have MacDonaldis at Glenrohan and making it home to have dinner there!!

Thanks to James for minding Ruby!

Until next time (that is in 4 weeks time - Mark Webber Challenge)... take it easy

Phil B

Race Reports

Upper Murray Challenge

By Jo Barrett

Khancoban, 2nd Oct, 06

Hi All,

It is no secret that my husband talked me into racing this event.

His pitch - as always - was that this would be a super fun weekend and we were heading to a place we'd never visited before, so giddy-up!

Anyway in a moment of weakness - as always - I agreed to his cunning plan although remained secretly worried about my complete lack of preparation, aside from a few early mornings out on the Yarra in the TK1.

We headed up to Corryong via Wodonga where I was further bribed with a bacon and egg McMuffin and a McDonald's coffee and soon we were winding our way towards Khancoban. It was indeed beautiful countryside. Rolling green hills with the stunning backdrop of the Kosciusko National Park, complete with snow capped ranges framed by a perfect blue sky. Heading into town for a few provisions we realised how tiny Khancoban really is, and indeed what a big deal this race is for the town. Arriving at the beautiful Khancoban Station, owners Michael and Helen warmly greeted us despite us interrupting their family lunch with our embarrassing intrusion. We were shown to the 'Fisherman's Quarters' a group of buildings on the farm with stunning views of the mountains from every room. It was magic!

Phil was a bit disturbed that he couldn't watch the weages in the grand final (no TV - or radio!) so we headed out for a mountain bike on part of the course which climbed steeply up through a paddock, climbed even more steeply up to a ridge, then for fun, climbed more steeply again up to the trig before a series of interesting descents. We decided that ignorance would be bliss, and only rode part of the hill, descending down a gnarly hill where I managed not to plummet to my death. Anyway we spent a pleasant evening with Mark, Caroline and their baby Caitlin, trying not to think too much about what lay ahead.

It was a crisp early morning start outside the Khancoban General Store and we met up with our support crew Nic Davies who I must say was absolutely wonderful! And her partner Pete.

We lined up for a mass bike start & took off into the nearby hills and began a solid climb. I started with my customary heavy breathing which led one guy to ask if I was OK?! I assured him that this gasping as if my last breath would continue for seven hours so not to worry too much! I enjoyed the climbing in a perverse way. I think my uphill riding has improved although I'm no mountain goat like Philthy! The field quickly spread as the hills took their toll. Winding through the cruel ascents we eventually emerged back in town and headed towards the river and to Khancoban station to re-visit the hills of the evening before. I gained a bit of ground on the flat although the rocky road, alternating with grassy paddocks, ensured



slow going.

Soon I was climbing the familiar hill, I managed to climb up around a hairpin bend while others around me stopped and walked. Eventually we were at the top and the fun descents began! I managed to ride too close to some dead blackberries, which made their attractive mark, then I plunged through another creek, then a boggy mud hole - where of course I fell headfirst in. I was completely covered in mud and pond scum - luckily another deeper creek crossing enabled me to clean my bike and my shoes a bit. Riding next to the fast flowing river I saw Phil out in the TK and knew there wasn't too far to go.

Into transition Nic was there with my boat, floatie and all my gear - smearing 30 plus all over my face as I shovelled down a muesli bar and Nic put gels into the front pockets of my new jazzy irule multisport pants and I clambered into the boat, setting off into the turbulent flow, determined not to fall in and try and gain some ground on the lads not far ahead!

Unfortunately this would be the most difficult part of the whole day for me and I just didn't see it coming!!!!

My first spill was on a bend close to transition, I managed to tip out the water and got back into the boat without too much difficulty -(I believe this was captured in a series of charming vignettes by the race photographer!) Heading off again and swearing that this would be my only mishap, I came to grief another five kms ahead when I beached myself on rocks and was stuck fast.. Luckily two saviours in surf skis came to my rescue and as I battled to control the boat as the water threatened to carry it off down stream, I nearly lost my shoe and one of my drink bottles went floating off as well! My knees got cut up from kneeling on the rocks and trying to stop the boat going. Eventually I was back on my way after losing a good 15 minutes in the saga. Little did I know the worst was yet to come!

I was watching the water and being relaxed in the rough chop and kind of thought I'd be OK. Swinging around a big bend I had a guy in an arrow on my left who was taking the line I would have chosen to take. I ended up closer to the other bank and noticed some shallow water and rocks. Panicking slightly I tried to avoid beaching myself again but in pushing my boat into the middle of the river where I ended up stuck in a dead tree! I tried desperately to break the branch across my chest that was stopping the boat from flowing on, however I couldn't quite do it and soon the angle I was on ensured that icy water filled up my boat and I had to jump out and try to stop it. The boat flew out of my grip and somehow (I really can't believe how!) wedged, fully submerged, under the tree. It was impossible to budge! I was pulling as hard as I could to free it but it was no use!



Here again I was saved by my fellow competitors. Mark, a guy in a blue multisport boat, stopped, saw me in trouble, paddled back, abandoned his boat and helped me rescue mine. We had enormous difficulty but eventually pulled the boat free. We were floating together down the river now and I started to panic as the freezing cold water flowed around me. Mark then had the job of getting me safely to the bank so we let the boat go. He helped me to swim across the current and I was safe. Emotional as I was I think I freaked him out slightly but hugging him and possibly trying to give him a kiss! He headed off to rescue his own boat and left me to ponder where mine was. Where are you boatie? Where are you?

Another saviour in a white TK had gone back upstream to rescue my paddle. I saw it on the opposite side of the river as I jogged along the bank and over 500 metres downstream I saw that he had rescued my boat as well!! Unfortunately, given that I was on the wrong side of the river, I had to psyche myself up and plunge back in, floating across the strong current and swimming hard. My rescuer threw out the blade of his paddle and I grabbed it and was guided into the bank. From there, my team of heroes finally felt as though they could leave me to it. They paddled off and I marvelled at their sportsmanship and that they had willingly sacrificed half an hour of their own race to help another competitor. It was truly amazing stuff!

I jogged back up the other bank and found my paddle - and finally climbed into my sorry old kayak. Paddling along for what seemed like an eternity I finally made it into transition where I later found out that my paddle time rendered me STONE MOTHERLESS LAST (in that leg)! So much for five murray marathons - what a shameful disgrace!

There wasn't too much time to ponder what could have been. I donned the runners and off I went on the final leg of this arduous day. Winding for 7km up a slow dirt road in the blazing sun, luckily I was still half wet from my brush with hypothermia! I jumped a fence and climbed slowly up to the base of Mt Elliot. From here there was no more running, it was just straight up into the sky. Amazingly I motored uphill at a reasonable pace and shoved down a couple of energy gels when I had an attack of the dizzies half way up. I passed a few of my rescuers battling onwards and upwards and I shuffled determinedly along the ridge of the huge mountain until eventually - I thought I'd never get there! I started the final descent.

At the bottom of this massive hill I began the run into Corryong. I had a cheerful encounter with Nic who gave me sports drink and lollies and told me the worst was over. In a cruel twist, the bitumen road stretched out in front of me and seemed to wind mercilessly up around the final insulting bend. I played the 'jog between the trees and walk through the shade' game to keep myself going and managed to pass one other bloke on that last nasty hill. As I approached the finish line Phil was waiting for me. It was finally over! It took me over eight hours to complete the race. With a disastrous kayak I could have easily sliced about 45 minutes off my time. As frustrating as this was I was just so relieved I had made it. As I staggered into the Corryong High School hall to inhale a plate of spaghetti, word had already spread about the girl nearly drowning on the kayak leg. At the very least I have become an amusing cautionary tale for the kiddies.

Super fun? Only for weird masochists (like Phil). Challenging? Are you serious?! Would I do it again? NOT IN A TK1 !

Cheers,

Jo ☺