

# Race Reports

## Racing in the hills...

### Upper Murray Race Report

By Kate Reeves

Khancoban, 2nd Oct, 06

*"The Upper Murray Challenge, hmmm, 38kms of mountain biking, 26kms of paddling followed by a hilly 25km run. What a great sounding event... but what on earth am I doing here!?"* All this was going through my mind as I squared up at the start line on a brisk spring morning in Khancoban last week...

A couple of years ago whilst returning from a ski trip to Kosciusko we passed several cars adorned with bikes and boats and wondered what was going on. Someone piped up that it must be a multi-sport race, the Upper Murray Challenge. I remember thinking that it all sounded quite cool, pity I couldn't paddle or run. But somewhere a seed of an idea must have been planted... So it wasn't a total accident that I ended up on the start line two years later. Little by little I have been trying to convert myself from a long time mountain bike only chick into a runner and a kayaker too (and there's still a long way to go mind you!) I started to check out a few different events and, along with a crew of willing accomplices, have worked my way through various Kathmandu, Teva, AROC and the Anaconda races, sometimes doing the whole thing and sometimes doing it as a relay but this was going to be a big step up!

It was still by no means certain that I was going to the 2006 UMC, although mentally I had made it a goal for the year. I was having nightmares about running 25km, seeing as my poor old knees were struggling with the conversion to running and then the 'fast flowing eddies' that were mentioned on the race info started to give me nervous butterflies when thinking about the paddle... However a few river trips with expert tuition from my fiancé Sam, a zillion knee strengthening exercises and a half marathon later meant that I dealt with those fears. I now just needed to ask everyone I know whether they thought I should do it. No-one turned around to tell me I would be bonkers to consider it, so enter I did. (Big thanks to Sam, Gill, Del, Jaq for all the wise words).

Having monitored the weather and the river level all week, written a beautiful spreadsheet listing my equipment and nutrition needs and most likely annoyed the hell out of everyone around me with my nervous energy, the race weekend finally arrived. Half of Melbourne appeared to be descending on Khancoban so the day before was a terribly social occasion and good fun, but I still had the race ahead and I couldn't stop thinking about it. We checked out the first half of the paddle on the Saturday and I tried to ignore the huge hills all around me, knowing all too well that we'd be sent to their summits the following day! Aahhhh!

The race goes between Khancoban and Corryong, two beautiful little towns at the base of the Main Range and I was just excited to be there. I told myself to do my own race, don't go nuts on the bike and to look around at the scenery every time I felt tired. So, off we went - and straight into biking hell too - those hills never appeared to end and even the flat was hard!... Strangely all I could think about was that at least it was only 1 lap and I didn't have to ride it again! (Too many 12 and 24hr MTB enduros...)



I had a shocker of a ride, (damn that was supposed to be my good leg!), and finally it was over and I was transitioning into the kayak. I was very excited to be doing this as it felt like I was never going to get there at one point. Not being an expert paddler I was in the trusty Endorfinn surf ski purchased last year for the Anaconda at Lorne. It was a great boat for this first attempt, but I have vowed to be able to paddle a sexy, lean, mean machine next year.

I made my way down the river without incident and really enjoyed it – again the novelty of it all was winning over the pain! I hardly saw a soul on the paddle and was wondering where everyone was, it was quite bizarre.

So finally, on to the run... I was so chuffed to make it this far I can't tell you... I almost felt like I'd finished as I was running along the dirt road after another fab transition (I've never had one person tying my shoe laces, another applying sunscreen and a 3<sup>rd</sup> stuffing a jam sanga into my mouth simultaneously before!). However I knew this was going to be a long haul and estimated a good 3 hours for the 'run'. Run, ha! I don't remember running that much – more like slog up and up and up! I had been warned, and it didn't disappoint.



There were plenty of fellow competitors around at this point now thank goodness – a good mix of team runners looking quite spritely and individuals kind of grimacing, lots. On and on we went up the hill... a very social place it was too, with everyone willing to have a bit of a breathless chat as we climbed our way up, I think somebody even told me that they launch gliders using catapults from the top... I thought that sounded like a great idea, much better than running off this thing. But no, on we went.

The ridgeline was longer than expected, but finally we started to see glimpses of Corryong down through the trees! The descent off the ridge was great, I hammered

without considering the quad pain that I was letting myself in for and overtook people who had got me on the up! One final sight of the fabulous support crew, Cords, I dropped off my still very full Camelbak (why did I carry that?!) and continued the final slog into the town. Again I had been warned about this, and yep, it didn't disappoint either. With great relief I saw the 2km banner and picked up the pace for the run into town...

Hitting that finish line was a great experience. I had achieved my first 'proper' individual multi-sport race and was just so chuffed that I had done it!

I take my hat off to those guys and girls up at the pointy end of the field; however it truly was an impressive effort by all competitors. Thanks to all involved for making it such a great event! See you again next year.

So what's next?? Anaconda Lorne as a marathon pair is the idea; sh\*\* just need to learn to swim now.....

Kate

*(Just one question – where were all the female racers at UMC? Without the Melbourne Adventure contingent there almost wouldn't have been a women's race... hopefully reading this might convince a few women that you don't need to be incredibly hard core to do this... I'm not... I'm soft and nice, honest).*