



Trans Taupo – 3 join sub 4 hour club

Three craft and their six paddlers became the first to join the Trans Taupo exclusive 'Sub 4hour club' in the inaugural event on the weekend.

After a flood of late entries, 77 craft of various types took to the water with exactly 100 paddlers/rowers on board for the first race of its kind across of pure crystal mountain fed waters of Lake Taupo (New Zealand's and Australasia's largest freshwater lake).

The day could not have been dawned better as the early morning mist cleared and paddlers/rowers congregated in mass on the tranquil waters in Tokannu Bay. With variable 10 knot winds forecast (assuring paddlers would get a bit of everything) and a predicted high of 19 degrees (incidentally the same temperature as the water), the scene was perfect for the battle of the human powered craft and a crack at breaking into the sub 4 hour club.

The mass start always had spectacle written all over it and it did not disappoint those amongst it and those watching from the shore. For the first time in the known history of open water racing, surf ski paddlers, sea kayakers, waka ama kaihoe (outrigger paddlers) and ocean rowers lined up side by side fellow sportsmen/women eagerly awaiting the start of NZ's newest and longest open water race. Craft set off on the Trans Taupo voyage at 8:05am on Saturday 12th April 2008 to the cheers of watching friends, family and supporters.

With Lake Taupo $\frac{3}{4}$ of a meter lower than normal after a cracker summer, paddlers/rowers raced for a good line down the centre of the marker poles and out into the larger Waihi Bay at the southern end of Lake Taupo. It was surf ski paddlers who immediately set the early lead, paddling over the shelf into deep water of the bay and heading around the Tongariro River delta. In amongst the lead group were race favorite and arguably in form NZ's no# 2 surf ski paddler Simon McLarin (Auck), ex-top multisporter Tim Grammer (Auck), past world down river team's race champion – Aaron Cox (Wanganui), and Simon Greenwood (Auck). They were soon joined by the force of the Wanganui River Scullers quad ocean rower (of Lance/Murray/Tony and Pat) who starting conservatively had powered to the fore once out in the open water.

Not far back in a second bunch was NZ's World Ranked Number#1 Female Surf Ski paddler Katie Pocock (Auck) and with her the leading double sea kayak men's pairing of Dave Rudge and Jerome Sheppard from Wellington.

Passing Check Point 1 (CP1 and refueling point) at the mouth of the Tauranga-Taupo River, the Wanganui River Scullers had managed to break clear of the surf ski paddlers with the exception of the Simon McLarin who sitting on their wash and would just not let them go. Feeling a little guilt he dropped back momentarily to the chasing ski paddlers to urge them to come up with him to the lead quad rower, before he made the jump back up onto their wash alone.

Through CP2 (and the team transition point) at the northern end of Mission Bay and 16.8kms gone into the crossing, little had changed, with the Whanganui Ocean Rower with Simon McLarin in tow leading the way. A few hundred meters back from them was the surf ski trio of Tim Grammer, Simon Greenwood and Aaron Cox. And the same distance back again was a bunch of surf ski and sea kayakers including leading woman Katie Pocock.

After a flat calm journey across the lake, the leaders then rounded Motutere Point and began the leg up to Hatepe point into a light head breeze. This leg, although closest to the shoreline, proved to be the competitors toughest as the breeze strengthened a little as the day began to heat up.

Passing CP3 (the last checkpoint and refueling opportunity) at Hatepe Point, and with the largest most exposed leg of roughly 20km into Taupo to go, Simon McLarin decided he would take on the Wanganui River Scullers in an all out drag to the finish. Over 5km's out in Lake Taupo off Te Kohaiakahu Point Simon Mclarin took advantage of the gathering variable winds and lumpy lake conditions to take the lead and edge ahead of the Quad. But the rowers refused to give an inch and the battle pursued.

First to beach their craft in front of the Taupo Yacht Club and run 20 meters up to the finish to take out the inaugural Trans Taupo challenge in impressive fashion was 46yr old individual surf ski paddler Simon McLarin in the now race record of 3hrs 45min 49 sec. Just 1 min 46secs back in 2nd was the quad ocean rowing team the Wanganui River Scullers. Fighting hard all the way and doing his best to reel them in was Tim Grammer a mere 37 seconds further adrift. All three craft (6 paddlers/rowers) becoming the first to join the illustrious Trans Taupo 'Sub 4hr Club'.

In an impressive show of paddling strength and fitness, Katie Pocock beached her surf ski and raced ashore to be a notable fourth overall across the line, merely 23 seconds outside the 4 hr mark and missing joining the Sub 4 Club with the lads. With unfinished business, she'll no doubt be back to etch her name in the club's lifetime members book next year.

Fifth over the line and first double sea kayak was the men's pairing of Dave Rudge and Jerome Sheppard (Well), just 41 second outside adding their names to the Sub 4 hr Club also.

The winning male single sea Kayaker was Rick Martin (Hastings) in 4hrs 22min 47 sec in 17th place overall, and Rowina Hayes (Taupo) took line honors in the women's single sea Kayak in front of her home town crowd, placing 53rd overall.

Bryce Irving (Tauranga) edged out Tonga White (Ngaruawahia) by 2mins 12 sec to take the single men's waka ama title, coming in in 14th place overall.

Best amongst the men's single ocean rowers was Craig Smith (Hunterville) in 27th spot, and just 11 min 1 sec back keeping him honest in 30th overall was Tracy Moorehouse (Wanganui) 1st female single ocean rower. The Team Tasman crew of Gordon, Steven, Simon and Scott muscled their purpose built Bridge to Bridge Tasman Sea crossing boat across the lake in nothing short of what was a spectacular sight, finishing mid-field in 40th position.

The all women's double sea kayak was won by Aucklanders Julie Hopkins and Prue Fry (41st overall to finish) and the mixed doubles sea kayak title was won by Christine Couldrey and Paul Dutton (Raglan) in 4 hrs 8 min 23 sec, 13th overall.

Finally Christian Liebergreen (an overseas tourist) and teammate Stu Golding convincingly took out the single sea kayak relay combination, joining forces at the last minute and each competing half of the journey across the lake with great combined success.

The Trans Taupo will be back in March 2009, which is pleasing news on the ears of all those who competed/watched in the inaugural event and are speaking of their return next year. If you're keen to join them, be sure to get your entry in early for year 2.

Many thanks are extended to all the Event Sponsors who got behind the event when its success was an unknown. Further gratitude goes out to the Tuwharetoa, Harbour Master, local Coastguard and regional Council, plus friend and family for their tremendous support in getting the event up and going, and making it such a great success.



Race Organiser: Neil Gellatly
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