

Young Guns Overshadowed at Porirua Grand Traverse

Two up and coming Wellingtonians dominated the 12th Porirua Grand Traverse, but they were overshadowed by one of New Zealand sports golden boys.

More than 800 participants from all ends of New Zealand turned out for the epic kayaking, mountain biking and mountain running event around the hills, harbour and coastlines of Porirua City.

The multi-faceted race showcases the districts outdoor wonderland, from hidden coastal tracks to urban trails, the scenic Whitireia Coastal Park, Porirua Harbour and private coastal farmlands, to the new purpose built mountain bike trails on Rangituhi-Colonial Knob.

Daniel Jones lined up as odds-on favourite for the feature multiport race, while Kathryn Bunckenberg was tipped to take over the mantle from her twin sister Lizzy, who had won the previous two editions. Both delivered comfortable wins, but the talk on the day was the participation of double-Olympic champion Mahe Drysdale.

The 2012 and 2016 single skull gold medallist has always enjoyed multisport in his down-time. In Porirua he teamed with Mayor Mike Tana and local doctor and mountain running champion, Dougal Thorburn. They would finish second among mens teams, but Mahe also took to the 7.5k Arena Fitness Fun Run/Walk with wife Juliette.

Daniel Jones and Kathryn Bunckenberg, however, are standouts in their own realm. Jones had proceedings to himself, shrugging off strong winds to lead from start to finish for a massive 55min winning margin over Mark Bestbier in 3hrs 34min 43min.

Bunckenberg, however, trailed local veteran Kris Jarvis by a minute after the 13k kayak. Once on mountain bikes, however, she wasted no time in hitting the front. Wellington-based Swede, Asa Sund, emerged as best of the rest and would win the veteran section, but Bunckenberg had 11min in hand at the finish line as the 24-year-old outdoor instructor crossed the line fourth overall in 4hrs 45min 16secs.

Women also shone in the multisport teams, with Lizzy Bunckenberg this year teaming with Amanda Broughton to finish second overall in 4hrs 28min 20secs, just four minutes behind winners team Blydepinckwoods of Alyssa Blyde, Richard Pinckney and Todd Woods.

The Duathlon option also went the way of the defending champion, with Wellingtonians Patrick McKenna finishing 12min clear of Martin McCrudden in 3hrs 01min 22secs. The women's Duathlon, however, went the way of a relative rookie. Wellington's Emma O'Loughlin was as surprised as anyone to be first across the finish line, wondering even if there were any other women out there. There were, but they finished almost 30min behind O'Loughlin's winning time of 4hrs 03min 55secs.

The mountain run only options were close fought affairs. Just 50secs separated Lower Hutt runners Sam Hansby and Blair Simpson, with Hansby winning in 1hr 35min 30secs. The women were even closer, with former national mountain running rep Marjolein Cook holding out top veteran Anne Rose by just 14secs in 1hr 49min 03secs. Both are from Porirua.

The men's mountain bike only option also stayed in Porirua, with teenage standout Ryan Corke defending his 2016 title, this time 46secs clear of former national rep Wayne Hiscock. Wellington's Alofa Kosina was first among women.

A big part of the Porirua Grand Traverse in recent years has been the Arena Fitness 7.5k fun run/walk. From modest beginnings of less than 100 starters, this year saw more than 400 people adding to the festival atmosphere. The first to finish the tour of Titahi Bay's Whitireia Park coastline was Wellington's Andrew Kerr in 33min 08secs. But the highlight was 12 year Wellingtonian Sarah Hay finishing first among women by almost two minutes in 36min 41secs.

Fastest team in the Arena Fitness Fun Run/Walk proved to be Raroa Intermediate, while Tawa Intermediate put in the biggest group entry with over 100 students and teachers participating.