

# Two GIANT Aunties – One Epic Adventure

## KEEN ADVENTURE RACE – ALPS TO THE OCEAN

Well the Aunties have just completed our most incredible epic adventure ever – the KEEN Alps to Ocean Adventure Race...a 5 day journey from the beautiful alpine village of Falls Creek to the lazy seaside town of Lakes Entrance. What we endured over the 4 stages will stay in our minds for a long time and raise the bar on the abilities of veteran females in long distance Adventure Racing.



Our goals in the event were to FINISH (as a mystery illness had been plaguing Auntie Jan for the last 6 months ...think it's menopause..) see a wombat and remain friends ... and, besides a couple of low points, we firmly achieved this with the help of our wonderful all-girl support crew Jude and Roz.....  
Read on for a joy?-ride though some of our amazing experiences.....

Arriving in Falls Creek after going the LONG WAY from Omeo (thanks to that guy at the Service Station..) we moved into our (ski) lodge, had a quick dinner, couple of Reds and an early night. Tuesday 8.00am we headed straight down to registration. Catching up with all the crew from Rapid Ascent is always fun and we set about getting organised with bike numbers, kayak stickers etc, etc.... Race briefing followed at 10am and then the hand-out of maps... JJ mentioned that he'd made it a bit easier this year..... then smiled.....(wonder what that meant?) getting everyone excited/terrified!?! With the prologue due to start at 2pm we were "heads down" until then.....

### **Stage 1 – Prologue.**

The expected times for this leg were between 1.5 and 3 hours.... The Aunties managed to blow that all out of proportion and finish in just over 5 hours...., and in the dark! (Hmmm...we didn't think to carry our AY-UP lights!).... And we wanted to have sharp words with whoever estimated the time frame for the stage...(JJ blamed Sam and Sam was hiding away by this stage...staying away from irate Aunties...!)

The start was spectacular as we took the chair-lift to the Summit and retrieved 2 CP's before heading back down to our bikes....(us Aunties decided to take the chair down as well....saving already weary legs)..Onto the bikes and a long climb up to Mt McKay followed with a cool, fast descent to Rocky Valley Dam for a paddle!....Grabbing all the required CP's we then took off on foot for a freezing Leg that had us scrambling all over the Summit once again and darkness was almost upon us. We were lucky to run into a team who were retiring (newlyweds...Hmmm...) and they very graciously lent us their light. We managed to find the last CP without the light as Auntie Jan was upside down in a bush and unable to extract herself at that point, so Auntie Kim had to use Braille to punch the control card and then find me in the scrub (light pointing up) and help me down the steep descent under the chair-lift....Phew! – we finished this stage 36<sup>th</sup> out of 41 starters... but at least we finished! Heads down with a couple of Reds to mark up maps for the next 2 stages.....ZZZZzzz.

### **Stage 2 – Falls Creek to Mt Beauty**

Leaving Falls Creek on the bikes and heading up to a spectacular climb of Mt Nelse, we were surrounded by incredible views from every angle....The big climb was rewarded with an 'arm shattering' down-hill where we dropped our bikes on Bogong Saddle and commenced an amazing trek which took us up over the top of Mt Bogong and down Horse Ridge and Granny Spurs (where we had an encounter with a rather large but beautiful black snake) into Cairn Creek where we were rewarded with the sight of Cairn Creek Hut....! Oh joy!... We plodded on in good company with the Warrnambool boys, Toby & Phil who had travelled with us from the top at Tadge's Pt. Besides losing our other companions, Mal & Simon, we managed to travel slowly but surely to our destination of Bogong Saddle where our bikes were waiting for us (we luckily found the track, many didn't....). Onto the bikes and down, down, down we rode...then a sneaky left turn took us to a deserted old railway line...found the CP on the broken bridge, then had the joy(not) of riding the railway line alongside the aqueduct for far too long... you'll never get us on one of those Rail Trail tours, I guarantee!!! Finally at the main road we turned left and headed towards Bogong Village where we were on time for the 6pm cut off at the Ropes Course... however, on arrival we found that we were too late anyway and took a bit of time in transition where we checked out the orienteering course... Moving around quite well, we thought we had almost finished when Auntie Kim discovered we still had to find 2 CP's up a creek... This was not fun, it was dark, cold and we were tired (Auntie Jan was tired of walking on slippery rocks too!).... Anyway we persisted and Kim came back with the CP's punched, albeit a little wet and cranky... Back at transition Jude and Roz had been to the Pub and got us some Pizza... Mmmmm, this was most appreciated and we scoffed down nearly a whole one between us!.

At this point we had the choice of continuing on the course or taking the Short Course option which was to ride the road to Mt Beauty. As long as we finished the stage we were not unranked, but just incurred a time penalty for the CP's we missed along the way. With the knowledge of the magnitude of Stage 3 the next day (2 days), we opted for the Short Course, and were very comfortable with our decision; however we missed some amazing MTB single tracks by doing so. We rode into Mt Beauty, did a fun lap of the BMX course and were met by our wonderful support crew with hot chips for dinner. Snugly in the car we commenced the slow, windy road back up to Falls Creek for one last time.... Alone the way our poor Roz had to make a quick exit from the car as her hamburger for dinner decided to make a 2<sup>nd</sup> appearance.....Feeling better after a little spew, she decided to drive from that point and we were hoping that Jude wasn't going to come to the same fate... We finally made it back with all tummies in tact and stumbled up to our lodge (devoured a hearty steak, left over chips and glass of red.. oh and some chocolate) and headed to the bunks for a well-earned sleep after 14 hrs of racing and in 28<sup>th</sup> place. ZZzzzzzz.....snore.

### **Stage 3 – Falls Creek to Omeo – aka the big Day(s)....**

Déjà vu... we were back at the Lake!!....A 5.30am dark and freezing start saw us doing a paddle orienteer around Rocky Valley Lake (Kim was in her element with lots of rock-hopping).... Bodies were feeling a little tired already when we headed off on foot for an epic trek which took us East past many spectacular views (again) up to a high point (not sure what it was!) and then a long downhill towards Big River Bridge. We had plotted a course (more scenic) that we changed at the last minute on the advice of another team, so took the less scenic route which would land us on a road that was 'out of bounds' for a bout 2km.... Mmmmm, lucky I was racing with Aunty Kim who never breaks the rules, so we bush-bashed near the road along wombat tracks....(however, all wombats sleeping....but lots of wombat poo!) until the wonderful sight of the TA, and were lucky that we didn't incur any penalties for bad behaviour. Our crew were in good spirits and were keeping us amused with their observations of life as a 'Support Crew'... I knew it only too well, having had the same job last year. So, refreshed and with smiles on our faces we rode off for a massive ride where we seemed to be riding uphill forever... and were somewhere near Mt Wells. (wherever that was!..) Bike problems plagued us in this Leg and we not only had a broken chain but Aunty Kim's back brakes were sticking (and singing) and it was a long, slow trip. After an incredible rocky and sketchy descent in fading light we reached the CP at Wombat Hut just after dark, then spent 30 minutes looking for a "ferny flat" at CP21 as Aunty Jan misread the description (due to failing eyesight – an old lady thing...der!) until we realised we were just meant to read the sign on the tree that said "the letterbox".....and from there

it was still a long, long way till we passed CP 21a and had a chat with Tom & Sam (sitting at the "ferny flat"). They probably thought we were a little crazy as we told them of our highlight so far – seeing 2 wombats!!! – but were encouraging us to move on as they knew what was in store for us next.....Hmmmmm..... a couple of low points to come!

Our wonderful Crew met us with excitement – they had been busy getting our food heated, boats and paddle equipment ready and doing all the other 'support crew' stuff like patting and rearranging sandwiches, drinks etc. etc....hope they write a story as it's bound to be hysterical.....We were so happy they were having fun (and they were spending the night in the car!)....After a hot meal we donned our wetsuits, cags, booties etc. and started our (horror) paddle down the Mitta Mitta River. To start with it was quite nice – river flowing gently, light shining brightly, not too cold. But as we got further downstream, the rocks became much more prevalent, fog shifted in and we were getting agitated.... Thankfully we were paddling a plastic sit-on-top double kayak, as the amount of times we had to get out and push over rocks was too many to mention.... We were unable to see 1 metre in front of us because of fog and so managed to hit every rock and find every bit of shallow river that came upon us. We even got wedged on a tree at one point and found we weren't just 'rolling over the rocks and having fun' as Tom had suggested...!!!! Hmmmmm..... Lucky for him, he was asleep when we finally dragged our boat up the bank at CP 23 as we weren't happy Aunties.... The only joy at this point was a raging hot fire around which we warmed ourselves, discarded paddling gear and re-dressed for the epic trek we had ahead of us. Dave on the CP was most helpful, kindly removing Kim's shoe from being wedged somewhere in the hold of the kayak, we then proceeded to strip off in front of him..... and he generously offered us a bottle of Red for our journey....Hmmmmmmm, it was a hard decision to leave it behind (we opted for Tim Tams instead) and headed up to CP 29 which looked like it was amongst the stars oooohhhh a very long way UP and we were getting a bit tired!

Aunty Kim forged ahead with Aunty Jan lagging behind (story of our life!) I was getting a bit over Spurs right at this moment, but Kim was loving them! Up, up, up, and more up..... finally we found the CP and were delighted to meet up with team Entropic for the last part of our climb. It was well into the early hours now and our search for the next CP (30) had us going around in circles on a Spur... when I suggested we stop and rest and wait for daylight, Kim sensibly agreed as it was only about ½ hr away. A little nap on the side of the hill is a great thing when you're tired, weary and disorientated. It's amazing how clearer everything becomes when daylight arrives. We headed off more confidently where we had no trouble finding CP 30 and 31 and then hit the track and suffered a

fair bit on long, hot 7k trudge up the hill before we got CP 32. Breathe.....The bush bash down to CP 33 was difficult. We encountered a couple more snakes (Kim stepped on the end of a Brown one!) and finally ended up on the knoll with the infamous plate. This was our last point of contact with the outside world for quite some time as on our descent down to the river we made a monumental error and ended up coming down the wrong spur not really knowing where we were (but heading vaguely in the right direction, we think). We had also run out of water and we were fully into the heat of the afternoon and went searching the creeks for some. No such luck in any creek we found. It was not till we hit right at the bottom that we heard the sound of running water and delightfully splashed and drank in the fresh stream. Luckily when we were making our way down we had spied the main road and knew we were heading for it – even though it was a very, very long way off.... We had no idea if we were near the TA, but we figured we could flag someone down if need be. We eventually found which way to head and walked off (no running as Aunty Jan had massive blisters...) for the few km's to Anglers Rest and CP 37.

Our crew were beside themselves to see us and JJ tried to give Aunty Jan a hug – instead she hit him with the map (not hard!) We found out that there were many teams still out lost in the wilderness and we were so, so happy to have made it in before dark. Once again we were given the option for the short course, and there was no question that we would take it. A nice 30k downhill ride to Omeo followed (Kim was happy as Jude & Roz had rallied around the crews to get new brake pads and get them fitted – no more squeaking) and we arrived at the finish with 36 hours of racing behind us and in 17<sup>th</sup> place! Many teams did not complete this leg or opted to finish earlier which is a shame as they then became unranked and ended the event with a DNF. We were very happy with our decision to forge ahead, slowly but surely, as we only had one more stage to go..... and it would be relatively easy...Hmmmmm.....Our night in the Buchan Lodge was interesting to say the least.....

#### **Stage 4 – Buchan to Lakes Entrance aka The Finale!**

A fun little orienteering leg started the day – in the dark. So, off we ran with head-torches blazing to collect CP's in and around the Buchan Caves tourist area. It was really lovely, and we were not in a hurry....this was a short day and we just had to get to Lakes Entrance....We had Kim's bike problems sorted out, we thought, and we would just cruise the last ride and sit down for the last paddle.....Hmmmmmmm.....Nothing is ever as it seems. Two minutes into the bike leg which took us along the Orbost Rd to Wilson Cave, Kim was lagging behind and even losing time peddling her heart out when Aunty Jan was free-wheeling down a hill..... Seems like we

still had some trouble....!!! On arrival at Wilson Cave we were one of only a few teams left to find the 2 CP's inside...and luckily had the team of Mick and Shay from rapidocycles.com with us to help on a rather inelegant extraction of Aunty Jan through a very small hole at one of the exits...Not the way we came in..... Thanks guys....!! There was a moment of fear that I was firmly wedged there forever until you came along to the rescue !!!!

So... back on the bike.....We were travelling at 8km/hr, Aunty Jan towing Kim..... We knew there was lots of riding ahead, including a massive climb up to Mt Tara...and at this rate we would still be out there.... Aunty Jan, fatiguing very quickly suggested we stop and have a look at the wheel....and when the front wheel turned half a revolution then came to a dead stop we knew we were in a bit of trouble. There was no way we could continue on like this....So, what do two Aunties do at this point?... take out the front brake pads of course!! And that's what we did....Aunty Kim poked and prodded as we were not sure how to do this, but eventually they came loose, and guess what?... the wheel spun around beautifully..... Off we go again... and the climb up to Mt Tara was much, much easier! Aunty Kim was extra cautious on the downhills now only travelling with rear brakes, but she had no problem and we really enjoyed the downhill run into the little farming area of Wairewa....Sam Maffet who was sweeping the course and picking up CP's caught up to us in this area and we told him of our problems – so were happy that someone could relay a message to our support crew who may be getting a bit worried about their precious Aunties....



Finally made in to the start of the paddle and we were the last team to head off for a very pleasant glide on the flat waters towards Lake Tyers....and thanks to Rapid Ascent for extending the cut-off to 4.00pm just so us Aunties had the privilege of an ocean paddle.... Seriously, we were hoping to just run the beach, however when Sam

said the ocean was like a 'mill-pond' we thought we may as well give it a go.....Well it may have been a mill-pond hours before when the top teams went through but by the time we launched our boat it was like an angry washing machine!! Here we go again....!! Off we push, (nothing elegant about it!) into the angry waters of Bass Strait....Lucky for us we had chosen a stable boat for the event as we bobbed in and around the rising swells....falling overboard here was not a good plan!! Up ahead we spied another boat and the

safety boat with Big Tom and Dave on board. We were very happy to have their escort for the rest of the paddle as we had to beach at Red Bluff for a CP (where Aunty Jan was tempted to join some wild looking fishermen at their campfire...!!) Just as we left the shore again a huge thunderstorm was brewing in the north....we looked at it anxiously and we paddled even faster...but not fast enough and all of a sudden it was upon us!! Big Tom had opted to run the beach to warm up so Dave was beside us as we paddled furiously with our lightening rod paddles going like windmills!! After 15 minutes or so the speeding Aunties had out-paddled the pesky storm and behind us was the most amazing rainbow....OOooohh....AAhhhhh, how quite appropriate we thought, finishing the race shrouded in a RAINBOW....It should have sent a message to our awaiting crew that the Aunties were arriving!!! So, beaching at the surf club, at last!!.... we dragged our boat up the beach and made the final run across the famous Lakes Entrance foot-bridge to the finish line.... It was a rather emotional moment for Aunty Jan, who grew up in this area, to run through the banner held by her 80 year old Mum who came down to see her finish. Champagne popped (we were the only team that had it... surprise, surprise!) a few tears and hugs all round (even one for JJ....yes, we still loved him!) followed and Aunty Kim rushed off to the Ladies room as her stomach hadn't been behaving quite so well during the afternoon.

Freezing and exhausted we were ferried to our accommodation by Aunty Jan's cousin and were soon very happy to be warm and dry and sipping the remainder of the bubbles in our little cabin. Surrounded by our wonderful crew Jude and Roz, we expressed our delight in being able to finish an event of this magnitude to Mum and cousins. We achieved what we set out to do which was complete the course, stay friends and see a wombat.. (we saw two!!)

Many, many thanks go to our fellow team members Jude and Roz who endured so much of this event with us....for an all-girl crew they had a difficult job with logistics and also had the ingenuity to seek help from fellow crews when the need arose. Hopefully they had a wonderful experience bonding with us, and other crews, and were forever making us laugh with tales of life as a support crew.... The attitude of your crew can certainly make or break you in an event like this and we were so thankful for our girls who stood up to the challenge and took away a great life experience for their efforts.

Thanks also to Rapid Ascent for taking the Aunties out of their comfort zone (again.....!!). Not sure how much more fun/punishment us Aunties can take, but you can be sure you'll see us on the starting line of many more events in not too distant future.....

See you out there.....a very long way out there !!!

Peace & Love...

Xx Aunties Jan & Kim (the GIANT ones that Tri Adventure...)