

NZ 2020 Coast to Coast – by Justin Mercer

[Justin joined LCRK in September 2019 with the specific intent of training up for the kayak leg of the NZ Coast to Coast]. *The Coast to Coast is a multi-sport race from one side of New Zealand to the other. The 67km kayak leg is down the Waimakariri river.*

Day One. *It was a mixture of excitement and nerves standing on a west coast beach of the South Island waiting for the sun to rise. Robin Judkins, the event's eccentric founder, gathered us together and gave some last minute words of wisdom, encouragement that I can't recall and the race was off!*

The first run was over in a flash, and the ride was pretty fun and fast paced in a large peloton. The first really test came in the mountain run, running on the river stones doesn't seem too bad at the start but you feel every pebble come the 33km mark!



The nutters get it done in one day and the punters like myself take the opportunity for a cuppa and a lie down after the mountain run at Klondyke Corner. The campground had a great vibe, enough so that a young bloke driving a car (whose owner didn't know he had it) decided to stop in around 11pm to get the police off his back.

Day Two. *Prior to jumping in your boat right beside the river, which would seem logical, Robin had the foresight to get everyone back on their bikes for a 15km sprint followed by a 1km run carrying your bike back down to the river. I was feeling pretty good at the end of Day One, coming in 14th place for my age category.*

Whether due to nostalgia or his competitive streak, the old man insisted I used his circa 1988 built 'Delaware' for the kayak leg. The river was running, ~110 cumecs, and my mood oscillated between being thankful for the stability and frustration at lack of speed (not surprising at the end of each rapids section). As would have it, I got a quick reminder never to blame ones tools and took a swim at the 30km mark in the gorge when I lost concentration on an embarrassing benign eddy line.

Below: Justin in action - showing off his LCRK training!



The weather turned at the 55km mark and a strong southerly and rain was the reward for coming through the Gorge. I'd slipped a few places on the kayak leg, and could hear Tony question whether all those squad training tips were wasted, but reassured they were key to getting me the 5hr paddle!

The ride home was a grind but all worth it and an awesome feeling crossing the finish line at New Brighton beach Christchurch 12hrs 59mins later (not including cuppa and lie down). I claimed a quietly celebrated 19th for age group, 27th overall and a taste for another attempt when my wife permits it.

Below: Justin finishes with a handshake (and a can of Kathmandu?)

