

Photo: Adapted, swimming through the rain



course, or it could have been that riders pushed themselves especially hard along the trail, but something led to a bit of brain fade over one of a series of fog jumps just about here. Rider after rider went arse over elbow, right in front of the camera crew (filming a TV doc) and the official photographer. Thankfully, none were much worse for wear.

The absolute highlight of all that carnage was when local riding identity Bruno Wicki, a grey-haired riding wonder otherwise known as Santa (the beard), had a rider come down right in front of him, on that very jump. Instead of slowing down, he picked up speed and cleared the crumpled competitor below him. That's style!

Cape to carnage

The following and final day, another 14km of single track, freshly laid and sculpted by the local mountain bike club, was worn in by a few hundred wheels. After the sandy slog at the beginning, everyone was well relieved to be out of the desert and into the trees. And although there were a few jumps, everyone took it easy. The film crew was unimpressed.

At the same time as most of the field (around 200 people, depending on the stage) was pushing its limits to varying degrees, a couple of handfuls of sponsored and otherwise super-skilled riders were racing against one another for line honours. Coming out on top overall was 2008 Men's Solo 24hr World Champion James Williamson, with his similarly skilled girlfriend Nikki Fisher taking out the ladies' title. These elite riders ride in a couple of hours what the back of the pack needs five hours to complete. It's rather awe-inspiring.

Unfortunately, one of the elite riders also had the most awesome crash. On the final day, Johnny Weidell, who in 2003 spent almost a month in a coma after an horrific bike accident, managed to fling himself off on a fast downhill section, roll in a stack of cow poo, and rip his right arm into a meaty mess. After a suspect shard of bone revealed itself in an X-ray shortly thereafter, he went off to Perth for surgery.

Cape to competition

The Cape to Cape actually sought not to be a race, which made any half-fit cyclist feel at home, but for the better (I reckon) it turned competitive, and became a personal challenge for many riders. For one guy, also called Andrew, his goal was simply to make it to the half-way drinks station every day. For another, Tony (another South African) it was simply to finish. Chatting with eventual second-place getter Robin Adams about his ride, Tony simply said, 'It would be an honour to come last in the Cape to Cape.'

As it happens, snake-confirming Fiona and her husband Allen rode with me all the way to the stage-two finish. We chatted, ran out of breath, and urged each other on. We shared the few kilometres through Lecunim Estate winery (yes we did ride, gloriously, past the vines), and all enjoyed the admiring waves of diners on the restaurant's deck. As the final, gruelling, five-kilometre stretch turned into a doubly impossible calf-exploding walk or quad-busting ride up a cruelly steepening sandy hill, the three of us fed whatever reserves we each had left, and triumphantly made it across the line.

GET PLANNING

The Cape to Cape ride runs towards the end of October. For more information, visit www.cape2capeamb.com

More Information

So you've done the Cape to Cape, and now you're home and based in the fabulous southwest? Hear you ask what else there is to do? Well, beer is clinically proven to be the best recovery drink from a hard four days' mountain biking. In this patch of fast rails, you're spoiled for choice, with a number of outstanding microbreweries, at which to sip away the afternoon. Try tasta the South (www.tastatheouth.com.au) brewery tours for a responsibility-free experience. The crew also caters for grape fanatics.

Chocolate is another essential ingredient for post-exhaustion recuperation. The 'Biggest River' Chocolate Factory (www.chocolatefactory.com.au) is a sweet tooth's heaven. The milk chocolate buttons make great breakfast cereal. Yokawa Koffee Works (www.yokawa.com.au) is just around the corner, and they're totally zapped about everything coffee. Just don't question the 'K'. Single-origin varieties from around the globe, both familiar and obscure, are available as well as fine blends. And there's the single-malt-producing Great Southern Distilling Company (www.distilling.com.au) near there.

Feel something completely different, hit the surf. If you're accomplished on a board, you can take your own down to Boranup, away from the Margara River Croards. Otherwise check in with the Margara River Surf School (www.margaraiversurfschool.com), who'll show you the ropes at the gully.

