

**Start Sunday Oct 21 11pm, fine weather, Rio de Janeiro's Sugarloaf, 48km paddle**

Orion's three Kiwi crew plus Vavá our Brazilian driver, interpreter and jack of all trades finally made it to the base of Rio's famous Sugarloaf landmark after a couple of hours jammed into Vavá's bright yellow king cab ute along with 5 team boxes, 4 bikes and countless bottles of water.

The start was two hours late and from a different beach because of the first of several permitting issues to plague the race, but eventually got underway in a frenzy of paddles lit by the glow of hot air balloons and flaming torches.

**AT1 Monday Oct 22 1am, Fazenda (Farm) Amorim 45 Km Bike**

Vacate the city for the 100km drive to AT1 to drop off the bikes. Support crews were not allowed to stay at this TA to avoid sharing the narrow access road with the racers.

**AT2 Monday Oct 22 3am, misty, Restaurant Mineiro, 35km Mountain trek**

Pitched tent in the carpark of the restaurant for a couple of hours sleep. Morning showed glimpses of Pico Dedo de Deus (Fingers of God), a group of rocky spires, between lowering cloud and mist. The rumour mill was going hard about the fate of teams (including Orion) who had missed CP1 (which was later found to be wrongly placed).

Wilsa Hally Hansen were the 1<sup>st</sup> team to arrive at noon, 13 hours after the start. They were followed only 3 minutes later by Team Orionhealth who were looking strong and focused. The usual transition frenzy had the team heading off for a trek in 'Parque Nationale da Serra dos Órgãos'.

**AT3 Monday Oct 22 9pm, rain, Town Square, Correiras-Petrópolis, 70km Bike**

After AT2, the crew headed into nearby Teresópolis for a casual lunch, some cash and to buy more water, before the drive to AT3. Towards evening ominous lightning flashes in the surrounding hill were forewarning of a weather change to come. Sure enough at 9:30pm the racers and the rain arrived together, leaving some support crews (us) unprepared for a wet transition.

Buff Coolmax were first in having picked up an impressive 9 places on this leg. WHH were 11 minutes later and OH another 2 minutes back. OH reported a couple of nav errors but were still looking positive.

The rain forced a quick transition and OH were first out with the other two teams right behind.

The first 15km of this ride was to be escorted by the support crew because of busy urban roads. Luckily Stu's bike nav was on the ball as the support crew's navigator tried to make sense of the road book directions (until he found he was on the wrong page). It was a worry to see big Wayne struggling and clutching his leg. After completing the escort we stopped beside the road to see the eight bikes of Buff and WHH flash past in a tight group going very fast.

**AT4 Tuesday Oct 23 4am, rain, Cachoeiro do Frade, 23 km Trek**

The rain continued and support crew vehicles were held a few km from the AT where we tried to nap under the forecourt of a garage. Finally at 4am we were allowed up to the AT to collect the bikes. This AT was located beside an impressive waterfall. We could not see it in the dark and rain, but it was interesting to see the racers curled up in their bivvie bags on the side of the road, in the pouring rain, trying to sleep out their 2 hour mandatory stop.

The CP officials reported that that all three teams had arrived within 15 minutes of each other with OH in third.

This was supposed to be the start of the scheduled ropes section but this had been cancelled.

**AT7 Tuesday Oct 23 6am, cloudy, Fazenda Campestre, 32km Trek + Horse Trek**

AT7 was located at a very tidy farm complex which afforded support crews a sleep in the implement shed, and toilets and hot showers.

At 9am Buff arrived with Wilsa 40 minutes behind. OH got there an hour later, having slept an extra hour. They seemed a bit flat and reported another nav error, but 20 minutes later were out on foot heading for AT8 (the horses).

The crew used the farm water facilities to clean the bikes which were caked in mud and making grinding noises from the brakes. Team Sole turned up 1½ hours behind Orion

**AT9 Tuesday Oct 23 4pm, rain, 44km Bike**

A nice drive to AT9 including the usual water purchases and lunch at a roadside café.

There was no sign of the expected horse drop near the AT but with more rain expected we set up a high tech shelter using a blue tarp, sticks, bendy tent poles and adjacent vehicles. (Worked fine until WHH's adjacent vehicle had to go).

At 7pm Buff arrived, now with a 1¾ hr lead over Wilsa. We heard from officials that OH had left the horse drop and were expected soon. Soon turned out to be 1½ hr of tense waiting while trying to keep the gear dry in the now heavy rain.

Upon arrival team vibes did not seem good and another mistake was reported, caused by following the CP marshal's advice rather than sticking to the route on the map.

**AT10 Wednesday Oct 24 1am, rain, São Pedro da Serra, 24km Trek**

We drove to this alpine type village over winding mountain roads, at night in pouring rain and so missed all the scenery. What we thought was a shouting match in Portuguese between Vavá and an overtaking car turned out to be a reunion of old friends.

Transition was set up in a kid's playground using a climbing frame as a support for the tarpaulin. At 1am Buff arrived, looking very good and putting more time on the following teams. Wilsa arrived at 4am with one man looking very down. At 5:30 OH arrived, quite upbeat this time. A quick transition meant the crew could repair to an early morning bakery for hot cheese rolls and coffee.

**PC19 Weds Oct 24 7am, Rain, Macau Nature Reserve, 7km Trek, 7km river paddle, 9km Trek**

This was not a real TA but just a place to hand over the paddle gear. Buff arrived at 7am with 1 man limping and starting to show signs of slowing. Wilsa had gained on them a little and looked to be going pretty well. OH arrived 4½ hrs behind Buff and seemed to have lost their earlier zip after another nav error. We tried to spark them up with the news that the race was likely to be finished sometime the next day.

We found a bridge over the river to see them come by in their inflatable kayaks. The team had recovered their spirits and were obviously happy to be on the water and having fun in the rapids.

**AT13 Weds 24 1pm, torrential rain, Town Square Casimiro de Abreu, 16km Rail Carts**

The town bandstand served as the CP and the transition shelter. Buff now held a 2½ hr lead over Wilsa with OH 1¾ hr further back. OH were buzzing again after their spell on the water and had done the fastest time on this leg.

The next leg involved pushing dodgy looking carts along 16km of abandoned railway line.

**AT14 Weds 24 3pm, Rain, Rio Dourado, 23km Bike**

This AT involved a mandatory 1 hr rest stop, so we set up transition inside a derelict building opposite the railway station out of the rain, with sleeping bags laid out and hot food to hand.

Buff arrived at 2:15pm using 1 man to push while the others ran alongside. This technique was fast and did not stress the equipment. WHH arrived 3 hrs later using the ride on top method and showing plenty of French passion over problems with their cart. OH were 1½ hr later using 1 puller and 3 runners but reporting crashes, breakages and Heath Robinson repairs. But they had taken time out of Wilsa and were within striking distance of them.

Exactly 1 hour later and after 30 minutes of sleep they headed out by bike buoyed by the prospect of maybe challenging for 2<sup>nd</sup> place over the last two legs.

### **AT15 Weds 24 8pm, Rain, Waterfront at Port of Bara de São João, 36km Ocean Paddle**

Upon arrival at the AT we found that Buff and Wilsa had already left on the paddle and that Buff had just called on their emergency radio saying it was very rough at sea. Race officials therefore decided to prohibit any more launches in the meantime. Confusion reigned but with our racers due to arrive we set to preparing for them with tents, sleeping bags and food. They arrived at 9pm having taken time out of both leading teams.

Accommodating the team meant no tent and few sleeping bags for the support crew. In true Adventure Racing spirit Wilsa's crew pitched their own tent for us, though Lynne was forced to use the NZ flag as a blanket.

At 5 o'clock next morning the word came to launch as soon as possible. The weather had calmed and it had been decided to launch the waiting teams at intervals of 20 minutes. We learnt that Buff had finished the race at about 2 am and Wilsa Hally Hansen an hour later. It had taken them around 8 hours to do the leg amid breaking waves and capsizes.

### **Finish Thursday 25, 10am, sunshine, Praia Ossos in Búzios**

A 4½ hour paddle saw Team Orion Health cross the line for third on the beach outside their hotel. A feast of hot chips, ice cream and champagne was their reward. Team Sole claimed 4<sup>th</sup> 55 minutes later, beating Bjufors by 3 minutes. 6<sup>th</sup> was NZ team Merrell.

### **Aftermath**

Crew work doesn't stop at the end of the race and as the team headed for showers and bed, there were stacks of wet smelly gear to sort for the laundry and bikes, packs and shoes to be washed to a standard acceptable to NZ customs. Not so easy in a town without a reticulated water supply.

The next two days were spent cleaning, drying and packing but still with enough spare time for swimming and Caipirinhas on Búzios' famous beaches.

The prize giving on the Saturday night was done in Brazilian style, starting at 10pm. The party finished at 4am, just in time to check out of the hotel for the long journey home