

2012 Simpson Desert Bike Challenge . A Water-Stop Official's view.

By Lorraine & Alan Hancox (Water-stop 2)

Leap out of bed at 4.30 am, pack down and line up for departure at 5.30, already loaded with riders' water from the previous night. Drive 40 kms in convoy with the whip cracking overhead then set up Water-stop 2. Have a quick breakfast and the morning necessities before the first riders arrive to dump their empty containers, refill and be off. Once all riders are past, we move on to the 80 km lunch stop, set up our shade, unload the containers, have lunch, collect the afternoon water supplies and be ready to depart at 1.30pm for a repeat at 30 kms. In the evening there is just time to unload, set up camp, have tea and be at the meeting at 7.20pm to be picked on for minor indiscretions and laugh at those we have dobbed in, collect the next day's water and go to bed. Chuck in a day of north wind and 47.5 degree heat and a struggle over a few sand dunes, meet lots of strange but nice people, have a lot of fun and you have our snapshot of the Desert Challenge.



Lorraine and I feel privileged to be part of such a large, well planned and executed event and our congratulations go to Mark Polley and his team. Right from the start we were impressed by the attention to detail in all the documents that frequently arrived on our computer answering questions we hadn't yet asked. The fact that it all came together so smoothly without any obvious incidents confirmed the planning, communication and risk assessments had paid off.

Our son, Graham was part of a support team in 2011 and became determined to enter in 2012. We thought we would be a support crew for another rider this year but that did not eventuate so successfully applied to become Water-Stop Officials. We have been in or across the Simpson Desert at least once per year since 1998, it is always different but this was quite a new experience. Maybe the best part was the early morning temperatures that made it easy to get out of the swag, even at 4.30 am.

We saw our role as making sure all riders had a quick and organised access to their water and nutrition so made sure everything was laid out systematically on the shaded groundsheet and then using binoculars, identified approaching riders. We had water sprays at the ready too but found on the really hot days, riders preferred to douse themselves straight from a bottle.

Riders exhibited a range of styles; there was the lead group who didn't muck about, rode in, stepped off, threw their used bottles/camel-packs on the groundsheet, picked up replacements, got back on their bike and were gone. Then there were others, determined to finish but not quite so serious who rolled in, had a pee and a bit of a chat (not at the same time), exchanged or refilled their bottles, maybe waited for another rider then rolled out. Then there were others who rolled in, fixed their water supplies, had a stretch and maybe a rest on a chair, then cursed their stupidity before casually departing.



After the first day there were requests for ~~sun-cream~~ the dispensing via spatula by our dedicated medic companions and the discreet or not-so-discreet personal application to the affected area. We really enjoyed the companionship of the medic crews as we worked as a team tending to riders' needs. Often they ably helped with the more technical water dispensing when we were mobbed and between times we learned a bit about each other and got on well. We have to admit to betraying trust at times when handed some outlandish comment or activity on a plate that just

begged to be quietly transmitted to the evil Donna. Our medic staff at all times worked in a most professional manner, however one team who shall remain nameless were more likely to have been clowns that entertain children in the larger hospitals.

Day 4 (Friday 28th) was one to remember and one that was tough on riders. We had weather forecasts for damaging winds and high temperatures, a promise that was fulfilled. We had lightning during the night and the temperature was 27°C at 4.30am. Driving north along the K1 near Poeppel Corner the sun commenced its ascent over the dry salt lake to the east of the track. What a remarkable sight the red ball posed through the dense dust haze. We had to move on as those behind were hanging out for a look but still we managed a few more photos on the run. Setting up at the water-stop took a little skill in the wind, something our companions briefly lacked as their awning wrapped across the roof of their van. Maybe what they say about north-winds is true as several opportunities were presented to us that day and duly passed on to Donna for goosing. Having had two excellent sites on Thursday, our Director decided it was get-even-day so picked an atrociously exposed site for our afternoon stage (he did say he was sorry!), neither of us attempted to erect our shades, relying on shade of the vehicles. The temperature reached 47°C and the wind swept sand under the Troopy and swirled it up into the cargo compartment. Fortunately the wind was behind the riders otherwise it would have been a total Day in Hell.

It rained that night so we had to roll up a wet swag. Isn't it always the same? When you don't want to use it the following night it stays wet long enough to soak through to the sleeping bags and mattress! Making amends on the Saturday morning stage, Mark allowed us to set up in full view of Big Red where we were able to watch some support vehicles play on the slope. We were pleased to see all riders complete this section. The second convoy came through and a few played on the slopes long enough to almost get Snowy cranky, who had been playing the role of Mother Hen+so well. As we tailed along behind the riders there seemed to be some conspiracy afoot as Sweepq unsuccessfully attempted to catch Mel whose bike had had enough torture.

Hooray! No more work for us in the last stage so we joined the convoy to head for Birdsville. After booking into the Pub and having a longing look at the shower and bed, grabbed a drink and went out to wait for the riders' triumphal arrival after 572 kilometres of sand, heat, wind and dunes. What an amazing sight as they all rode in together! What an outstanding achievement after 5 Days in Hell!

Bringing this great event to a conclusion it was time to gather at the Pub, enjoy a few drinks, a feed and good company. This was done enthusiastically and followed by the awards presentations, an event laced with humour, emotion and humility. Well done riders!

No day could be complete without the embarrassment of Donna's fine session and they were generously handed out as always. Crikey! Someone was even fined for not being fined! Geese (gooses?) seemed to be wandering everywhere. Then there was the auction and money changed hands with rapidity as Snowy took on the role as auctioneer raising yet more funds for the worthy Royal Flying Doctor Service. Earlier in the day we had seen the Service at work, flying into Birdsville to transport a seriously ill desert traveller recovered from the QAA Line whilst our event was in progress.

Congratulations to everybody involved in this marvellous event; organisers, riders, officials, support crews and sponsors, without whom it just couldn't happen.

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