



Tough Guy and Girl Challenge Rotorua, New Zealand 19th August 2007

From memory, there were always three distinct groups of school kids during my cross country/sports lessons: 1) those that obviously weren't interested due to being asthmatic/overweight/endowed with all the athleticism of a sloth; 2) those that pretended to run the first little bit and then sneaked off for crafty cigarettes and a chat when the teachers couldn't see them, then took the short cut back; and 3) those that foolishly ran the whole thing, passing groups 1 and 2 en route. I was in the latter group. After school I never ran cross country again.

When a friend (Chris) came over and trained for the Taupo Ironman in January 2007, he had mentioned that he was considering entering Tough Guy UK (<http://www.toughguy.co.uk/home.shtml>). This is an event held in deepest Winter and is *never* cancelled for *any* weather, and consists of climbing cold steep muddy hills, wading through mud, swimming through mud, crawling in mud under barbed wire and rope netting, crossing single wire bridges over muddy bogs. There are other obstacles as well, but most involve mud in some way, shape or form. I told him he was mad.

In June 2007 I saw the advert for Tough Guy in Rotorua to be held in August (remember, that's New Zealand's Winter) and read what it entailed. 10 Kilometers - 6 miles (but they lied). Climbing cold steep muddy hills, wading through mud, swimming through mud, crawling in mud under barbed wire and rope netting, crossing single wire bridges over muddy bogs. There were other obstacles as well, but most involved mud in some way, shape or form. It looked like fun, so I entered...I think I might have had a momentary lapse of sanity.

So June came and went, as did July – and eventually August arrived. True to form I'd concentrated on carb loading and rest but not actually got round to the training bit. I *had* prepared by going to the local budget shoe shop and buying the cheapest pair of trainers I could find (NZ\$20 or about GB£7.50) - all they had to do was look like they would last one race. Apparently this is not good practice for normal or professional runners but then I'm neither of those things.

The weather hadn't been good for a week or so, but the night before the event, it turned ugly and *lots* of water fell out of the sky. I had discovered that a (sadly quite fit!) work colleague, Megan, had also entered and she was already in Rotorua and reported that the weather there was just as bad. If it didn't let up, tomorrow was

going to be a hard, dirty event. Actually it was going to be a hard dirty event anyway – it would just be very wet too.

I woke at 05:00 and we were all out of the door at 05:30 (my family came to watch me drown). The sky was quite clear – at least the rain had stopped – and the Sunday morning roads were clear. Four hours later I had parked in a field, was registering for the event and met Megan who had already had a quick look at the course. It didn't *look* that bad from what I could see and the sun was out...



You can tell it's the start – everyone is clean

The atmosphere was great and lots of people had donned silly costumes (strangely, I was the only one with new trainers). The start loomed and there was a bit of nervous tension in the air until the countdown...a couple of thousand people ran/walked up the first hill which plateaued out to a short straight and a fantastic view of Lake Rotorua and the surrounding countryside. This wasn't so bad after all!



Look, it's not that bad after all

The expression 'calm before the storm' is appropriate to describe the next parts of the course. The views were nice, there was a short flat and then the track dropped down a steep descent through uneven ground, gorse and scrub. I had thought that Megan and I would run together – but we parted in all the flailing bodies and I didn't see her again until the finish. The course went up again quite steeply and continued until we met the first mud feature – about calf-deep and sticky. This was a few hundred metres long and rounded into a hay bail obstacle and some fences that look a bit like miniature versions of the ones they use in show jumping. So far so good, and I began to pass some people who had run off like lunatics rather than pacing themselves and were paying for it now. Actually, this was rather fun!

A genuine gravel path beckoned – which seemed like a luxury! – and we ran up that until we met another hill, and a lot more mud. This time a small lake had either burst (or more likely been diverted) into a swampy area and we had to wade through at chest height whilst not falling over what felt like branches and rocks underfoot. Oh, and evidently eels live in the lake too. Spectators looked down on us and shouted encouragement and one or two of them seemed to be laughing at our expense.



That's the shallow bit

I exited the obstacle and wondered why my legs felt heavy – until I looked down and saw how much mud was stuck to my trainers. I could feel water and stones inside my socks too – but the trainers were performing well! The run continued between sets of orange marker flags...



Megan: laughing (or crying)

It was a bit of a trudge until the mud flicked off and the water squelched out and the going appeared to be easier until we hit yet another mud trap. This time there was a bridge above us and I spotted my family waving cheerily...they also informed me later that the mud stank, although happily this particular lot was only waist high. The trainers got heavy again, I stumbled through more orange flags...



Only waist high, this bit

The single wire rope bridge followed and, of course, this was suspended over some decidedly green-looking sludgy water. My trainers were slippery from the recent mud (not intentional by the organisers, surely?) and I hung on tightly to the top rope, losing my footing only once and lunging onto the opposite dry land. I headed for those dreaded orange flags again and kept running...



That's swamp under there...

Next on the list of obstacles to 'enjoy' was a crawl under a barbed wire area. Naturally this was in a muddy bog and you had to stay low to avoid jabbing your head on the pointy bits.



Megan under the barbed wire. Smiling.

Following that there were fences that increased in height so as you got more tired you had to expend more effort to climb higher and jump down further. Whoever designed this course was a sadist.



Doing my 'Grand National' impression

Following some more running, we were reduced to a belly crawl again as this time a rope netting area with low wooden beams had to be negotiated. I realised that it paid to be first as the more people that crawled and waded through all these areas, the more chewed up it all became, resulting in more splashes, more mud and more ingestion of whatever it was we were crawling through!

Clearly we hadn't been through enough mud as the organisers had then put the course through what can only be described as a mud pit. I looked at this stuff and thought that literally across the road from us people were paying quite lot of money to have volcanic mud baths in the Hell's Gate Spa. Neck high, stinking, totally uneven underfoot, and energy sapping. There was no easy way through it and swimming across the surface seemed to be the easiest way to make progress. Those that hadn't lost their footwear in the sticky mud so far had to be careful not to lose it now and bodies were strewn all over the place. It *ached* after all we'd been through to fight that mud and when I finally got out, my energy levels were low. And I hadn't finished.



Just before the deep bit – and I'm stuck! (but still smiling)

I could hear the tannoy announce that the first woman to finish 5 Km (3 miles) had done so in about 38 minutes. I wondered what my final position would be...from a quick glance ahead it was obvious that I wasn't in the first three overall, so I wondered where I was in my group (male 40-99), then my district (New Plymouth), then my town (Inglewood). Surely I was the fastest Inglewood finisher, as no one else had applied from there!?

I also heard that the course this year wasn't 10 Km at all – it was nearer 12 Km (7.5 miles). Oh joy.

I kept going and ahead of me there was a hill with ropes trailing down it and my aching muscles had to haul me up the 45° angle. Naturally the hill was neither smooth nor clean. However at the top there was that view again and about 500 metres of relatively flat grass to run on. Bliss! AND I could see the finish line just beyond it to my right. I felt happy and jogged to a stile...where they routed me LEFT. Obviously mental torture is employed as well as physical, as tucked away behind the stile the route jinked down some very uneven track with large divots and roots in the way. It was steep enough to require your already overworked thighs and knees to have to 'brake' down the hill, and then turned back sharply upwards, across a load of rocks and up steep steps. Only then did it emerge back out on a hill...which we had to slide down at a 45° angle in the mud (obviously), before our last obstacle – tyre jumping. Basically, a load of tyres placed against each other that you had to run over.



Still smiling...must still be the first lap then!

Only then did I see the finish line...

...and the 'second lap' marker. I had signed up for the 10 Km race (which was now nearer 12 Km). I had to do it all again.

Someone with a hose sprayed me – I'm not sure if it was an attempt to make my race number legible or just further humiliation – at any rate I resisted the urge to divert to the barn where there was free beer from the sponsor, free hot soup, warm showers, a spa...the first hill awaited.

And so it began again.



Once more into the breach, dear friends...

More mud, more slime, more swallowing of unidentifiable brown sludge kicked or splashed off someone else. More orange flags. In truth, I was enjoying the challenge as this was unlike anything I'd ever done before and I was secretly quite pleased that I hadn't collapsed in a heap and seemed to be reasonably well up the field. All that carb training must have done some good...



In for a penny, in for a pound

Mud merged into more mud – it was just different consistencies and depths; I managed not to scalp myself on the barbed wire; I avoided the green slime under the rope bridge; the running between obstacles seemed longer and more uneven; the hills seemed steeper and the gates seemed higher. I worked my way around and I knew, once I'd reached the tyres, that I was nearly there. I was covered in mud from head to toe, my clothes were brown, I stank and I was dog-tired. However the idiot with the hose had gone and this time I *was* able to head to the barn for that free beer...



Finished!

The results came through surprisingly quickly – the Rotorua guys are very efficient! I'd come in the top half overall and my final times were a first lap of 56 minutes and 15 seconds and second lap of 54 minutes exactly – a total of 1 hour, 50 minutes and 15 seconds. For 12 Km and a lot of obstacles, I was quite pleased.



Do you think Megan is happy?!

I came 482nd overall (977 took part in the long race) and 102nd in my category (out of 174) – males aged 40-99. 20 people from New Plymouth competed and 6 of them beat me – although two of them had *extremely* quick times and obviously cheated by training beforehand. The others only beat me by 10 minutes...if only I'd pushed a little harder...

Later that evening, the bruises, scratches and aches began to surface but I thought about what a great day it had been and how actually it had been *really* enjoyable. Maybe it's because most people there didn't take it too seriously, maybe because pushing yourself to that extent and succeeding makes you feel like you've achieved something. Either way I reckon I'll be doing it again.



What a team!



Our results

2007 TOUGH GUY & GAL CHALLENGE

19 August 2007 » Event Web Site



Summary • 10KM • 5KM

results: Tough Guy and Gal 10km Challenge											
		Filter	Sort	Record Navigation: 480 to 499 of 977							
#	Bib	Name	City	Lap 1	Lap 2	Finish Time	Place	Gender	Gender Place	Category	Category Place
480	1922	MARCELLE FOSTER	HILLCREST, AUCKLAND	00:56:10	00:53:54	01:50:04	480	FEMALE	101	F14-39	72
481	1709	CRAIG SCOTT	NAPIER	00:56:47	00:53:21	01:50:08	481	MALE	380	M14-39	278
482	2023	MARK BELCHAMBER	INGLEWOOD	00:56:15	00:54:00	01:50:15	482	MALE	381	M40-99	102
483	1482	JAMES ALLAN	MASSEY, AUCKLAND	00:50:29	00:59:48	01:50:18	483	MALE	382	M40-99	103
484	2063	MILES BARTKUS	PAPAMOA	00:57:44	00:52:35	01:50:19	484	MALE	383	M14-39	279
485	1263	HALEY HOLMES	LOWER HUTT	00:58:02	00:52:21	01:50:24	485	FEMALE	102	F14-39	73
486	1193	DARRELL HOLT	COCKLE BAY, AUCKLAND	00:57:47	00:52:38	01:50:25	487	MALE	385	M40-99	104
487	1042	DENNIS IRVING	MAIRANGI BAY, AUCKLAND	00:53:30	00:56:54	01:50:25	486	MALE	384	M14-39	280
97	1110	NICOLA WALTERS	TE KOPURU					FEMALE		F14-39	
98	1111	MEGAN STEWART	NEW PLYMOUTH	01:08:41	01:08:50	02:17:32	783	FEMALE	234	F40-99	58
99	1112	SIMON MATHESON	BIRKENHEAD, AUCKLAND	00:43:29	00:47:24	01:30:53	211	MALE	186	M14-39	137