

# USSHERS DEFEND TITLES AT MAGIC MULTISPORT EVENT



PHOTO BY NICOLA DE LA TOUR

World champion multisport athletes Richard and Elina Ussher have successfully defended their titles at the Genesis Energy Lake to Lighthouse event.

This two-day event starts at Lake Waikaremoana, in the Urewera National Park and finishes at the historical and original Portland Island Lighthouse now relocated to the centre of Wairoa.

Competitors travel 184km over breathtaking, rugged countryside. The first day comprises a 15km mountain bike, 14km kayak and tough 46km run, split into two legs, that includes a spectacular climb over the Panekire Range.

Day two includes a 23km mountain bike, 43km road cycle, 21km kayak and a final 16km run to the finish line at the Wairoa Lighthouse where a street party was in full swing to greet competitors.

Once again, the athletes were in full praise of the event, describing it as a 3-day cultural, physical and mental experience, and this year it attracted some of New Zealand's best multisport athletes, including Olympian and 3-time Coast to Coast Champion, Richard Ussher, and his very successful adventure racing wife, Elina.

Both were defending their individual titles from last year's inaugural event, and said they wouldn't have missed it.

"The race is more than just a race – it is an event. The people involved, the welcome and the hospitality we get from the local people makes it quite amazing really," commented Richard Ussher.

Richard Ussher dominated both days of competition in the individual field, however, had some company at the front end in the form of very accomplished multisport athletes, current Coast to Coast champion Gordon Walker and elite multisporter Dwarne Farley, who combined as a formidable two-person team.

Ussher was first off the mountain bike and onto Lake Waikaremoana in the kayak on day one, but the powerful duo of Walker and Farley pulled back and passed Ussher on the paddle, then extended on the run to finish 18 minutes ahead of Ussher on day one.

On day two Ussher made his break on the first mountain bike "not to get in the way of the battle between Marcel (Hagener) & Cam (Durno)," Ussher stated. Meanwhile Farley was left struggling up what must have seemed very steep hills with failed granny gears, leaving Walker to play catch up on the mid road cycle to Ussher who lead the overall

race and then paddled together down the Wairoa river. According to Ussher the remainder of the race was described as a 'gentleman's agreement', as Farley and Ussher ran the final 16km and crossed the line together.

"It seemed like the right thing to do," commented Farley at the finish line. "Ussher had worked so hard over the last two days and fought hard to stay with Gordon on the penultimate stage – we all decided just to run together for the final 16 kilometres."

For Ussher it made a very tough two days just a little easier.

"It was great having the company actually – especially on that last run leg. It was a tough finish to the event, there will be some tired individual athletes at the end of today," Ussher said at the finish line.

"This event is just brilliant though, we have been welcomed back like family and have had a great weekend both years, this is a hard individual race and just awesome for teams – I would encourage people to get here and experience it for themselves."

Marcel Hagener improved on his fifth place from last year, coming in second individual, with Taupo athlete, Cam Durno, taking third.

Hagener put his improvement down to fresher legs and a little bit of course knowledge.

"I was pretty tired coming into last year's race, I had done an adventure race just days before. This year I felt a lot better and really enjoyed the last two days of racing."

Elina Ussher, the other side of the very successful couple, took out the women's race by 45 minutes from Louise Mark (Auckland). The former Adventure Racing World Champion star from Finland finished a remarkable seventh individual overall, just over an hour behind her husband.

Auckland athlete, Emma McCosh, finished in third.

One thing all three place getters agree on is how stunning this event is.



ELINA USSHER. PHOTO BY IAN TRAFFORD

"It is just a beautiful course – there are times you are just looking around thinking 'wow' – this is a very special event. It is so well supported by athletes and locals - it has just been a great weekend," Elina said to the large Wairoa crowd that had gathered to welcome her in.

As well as the stunning surroundings, competitors were just as impressed by the organisation team at the event. 2009 Coast to Coast Champion, Gordon Walker says the organisation and overall event experience is up there with the best he has experienced.

"The organisers really did a great job – from the main committee right down to every marshal on the side of the road. It feels like the whole community supports this event."

Event director, Chris Joblin is quick to agree with Walker.

"It really is a community event; we have 180 volunteers involved, the majority of which take Friday off work to marshal on day one. The people of Waikaremoana also deserve a special mention, the way they open up their homes and welcome the athletes in for those two days – it is wonderful of them."

The village of Tuai, situated 6km by road from Lake Waikaremoana and home to the Genesis Energy Waikaremoana Power Scheme, is transformed from a relaxed, perhaps sleepy, village to Race Headquarters for Thursday and Friday of race week. The former school becomes registration, communications and main media centre while the lawn in front of Lake Whakamarino has a large marquee erected for the proceedings on both evenings.

On Thursday night athletes are hosted at a welcome dinner by the Waikaremoana Community and I guarantee you have never been at a multisport dinner like it. From the Maori performances to the local school's Wearable Arts catwalk display and, the highlight for many, the Master of Ceremonies – Mr William Winitana – a local and very accomplished international opera singer.

Competitors start their first day of racing on Friday morning from Tuai Village to Lake Waikaremoana by mountain bike, followed by a 14km kayak. It is after the kayak leg that the fun really begins with a 46km run, separated into two stages of 26 and 20 kilometres. Team competitors completing the second run stage are brought in by water taxi and have the job of traversing the Panekire Range.

"It can get fairly dangerous up there," explained Joblin. "The weather can be a lot cooler and also change very quickly but our safety plan is very solid – we have radio and first aid equipped marshal pairings every 5kms over the entire course and the Search and Rescue team run that part of things – they are fabulous."

Perfect conditions meant that thankfully the Search and Rescue team had a fairly routine day – the only one incident that did require attention was caused by a slightly under prepared French tourist who was tramping around the lake. After monitoring her progress for about an hour, it was decided to use the event helicopter to evacuate her.

The Lake to Lighthouse event was devised by the Wairoa Community Trust, one of a number of initiatives to showcase the beauty of the region as well as develop opportunities for the local community and businesses – in just its second year,

this event seems to be achieving that very well.

Compared by many already as the North Island Coast to Coast and just as hard – this event is brilliant and will grow every year. Next year make sure you are on the start line and experience the magic that is The Genesis Energy Lake to Lighthouse Challenge.



RICHARD USSHER. PHOTO BY SPORTZ HUB



MOUNTAIN BIKERS HEADING AWAY FROM TUAI VILLAGE

RESULTS:				
Individual Male - Open				
		Day 1	Day 2	Total
1	USSHER, Richard	7:05:09	5:50:23	12:55:32
2	HAGENER, Marcel	7:36:34	6:08:37	13:45:11
3	DURNO, Cam	7:39:06	6:24:18	14:03:24
4	PARKINSON, Neil	7:51:24	6:18:18	14:09:42
5	CLARK, Sam	8:04:53	6:29:32	14:34:25
6	DREW, Liam	8:11:29	6:23:28	14:34:57
7	KELLY, Mike	8:14:40	6:35:36	14:50:16
8	JOHNSTON, Mike	9:08:17	6:46:41	15:54:58
9	LOWE, Nick	8:51:20	7:05:13	15:56:33
10	WALLACE, Mark	9:28:56	7:00:08	16:29:04
Individual Male - Veteran				
		Day 1	Day 2	Total
1	MUDGWAY, John	8:26:06	6:45:06	15:11:12
2	WIHONGI, Phil	8:53:25	6:48:54	15:42:19
3	BRIGHOUSE, Craig	8:47:02	7:03:04	15:50:06
4	ROBINSON, Jim	9:03:30	6:51:54	15:55:24
5	LIVINGSTONE, Nathan	9:13:22	6:58:40	16:12:02
Individual Female - Open				
		Day 1	Day 2	Total
1	USSHER, Elina	8:06:28	6:39:26	14:45:54
2	MARK, Louise	8:31:04	6:59:03	15:30:07
3	MCCOSH, Emma	9:27:49	7:21:36	16:49:25
4	SVENDSEN, Sia	9:12:20	7:48:25	17:00:45
5	ALLAN, Katherine	9:59:16	7:47:39	17:46:55
Individual Female - Veteran				
		Day 1	Day 2	Total
1	HELLIWELL, Lyn	10:32:05	8:15:18	18:47:23
2	TEESDALE, Jo	10:59:47	8:37:24	19:37:11
3	CRUMMEY, Brenda	13:00:30	9:39:38	22:40:08

2, 3, 4 person team results can be found at [www.laketolighthouse.co.nz](http://www.laketolighthouse.co.nz)