

Kiwis Win World Title

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Press Release: Adventure Racing World Championships

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New Zealand adventure racing squad, Team Orion Health, won the Adventure Racing World Championships in Brazil yesterday, leading an all-Kiwi sweep on the podium.

Two hundred and forty athletes from 15 nations started the 520k of non-stop racing around through Brazil's Ceará, Piauí and Maranhão regions, with Team Orion Health shrugging off the defending world champions and temperatures up to 49 degrees celcius to win in just over four days.

As expected, the Brazilian location for this year's world championship was brutally beautiful. Racing on a secret course with only maps and compass for help, teams suffered high winds crossing the Delta of Parnaíba, trekked and mountain biked across the sweltering sand dunes of Jericoacoara, canoe'ed the River Coriaú, and traversed the mountain range of Viçosa of the Ceará.

The Auckland-based Team Orion Health of Wayne Oxenham, Anna Berthelson, Brent Edwards and Stu Lynch took the lead from defending champions, Team Nike USA, with just 18 hours from the finish. They reached the finish line in Jericoacoacara early this morning (NZ time).

"I'm without words," said Oxenham seconds after winning. "The race tested everyone; it was very hard but at the same time very good. But without doubt, this (finishing) is the best part of it.",

Oxenham also commented on the spectacular location and hospitable Brazilian people. "I was very moved when a youngster, who passed on his bicycle while we trekked under strong sun, returned from his house bringing frozen water".

The 2008 adventure racing world championship has provided the best collective performance by New Zealanders at any world championships, with Kiwis athletes in the first three teams across the line.

Former Coast to Coast winner Ian Edmond and wife Nora, racing for USA's Team Sole, passed the defending world champions, Team Nike, in the last 12 hours to claim second place. Team Nike, which included Kiwi's Gordon Walker and Chris Forne, maintained third place.

Team Sole's performance was a victory of sorts for their team make-up of two men and two women. Adventure racing rules require at least one woman in every team, so most teams opt for just the one. "What really made the difference was our strategy to always think more, searching to run more, to pass and always be better, faster, and thus we compensated what we could have lost in physical capacity", said Team Sole's leader, Paul Romero.

The second all-Kiwi squad, Team Powered by Velvet of Rhys Burns, Nathan Peterson, Sonya Clark & Chris Morrissey, who held fourth place for much of the race, also claimed ninth.

New Zealand's Marcel Hagener, who was part of the 2005 world champion team, finished tenth in the European team, Wilsa Helly Hansen.

Another European team, Bjurfors Adventure, with Cantabrian Sia Svendsen and Whakatane's Neil Jones, actually held the lead in the first day, but slipped down the leader board to thirteenth place.

Top Coast to Coaster Sarah Clarke (nee Fairmaid) is racing in a Polish squad, Team Speleo Salomon, that came from nowhere mis-race to finish seventeenth place.

Since the start of Adventure Racing back in 1989, Kiwis have dominated the sport. The official world championship event has been running since 2002 and this year's event New Zealand athletes have filled 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 9th, 10th, 13th, 17th. These performances at the top level are encouraging for domestic adventure scene, which has been suffering reduced participation and events.

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