

Local Scores First Win

Wellington's Lizzy Bunckenberg scored her first multisport win at the 10th anniversary Porirua Grand Traverse.

After a decade on the multisport calendar, the Porirua Grand Traverse gets bigger and better with 883 participants from all ends of New Zealand taking part in this year's anniversary event on April 12.

The multi-faceted race showcases the Mana districts outdoor wonderland from hidden coastal tracks and urban trails to the iconic Colonial Knob, Whitireia Park and Porirua Harbour to the event's race base at Whitireia Polytechnic.

Lizzy Bunckenberg has been a standout runner and surf athlete on the local scene since her early teens, so was a popular winner of the feature multisport race.

The 22 year old led another promising youngster, Rachel Baker, by three and a half minutes after the opening 10k kayak, which in strong winds had to be changed from the traditional scenic tour of Porirua Harbour and Puatahanui Inlet to a more sheltered two lap course in Porirua Harbour.

"I was just surviving out there," Bunckenberg said later. But once on the 26k mountain bike section through Porirua's urban trail networks she stretched her lead to eight minutes, while top veteran competitor Mary McBride moved up to second place.

Normally the 18k mountain run over Colonial Knob and along Wellington's rugged western coastline would have been Bunckenberg's strongest discipline. But foot surgery in November limited her running over summer and she admitted to struggling on this scenic but savage section. "I pushed really hard on the bike," she said, "so my legs were just dead on the run. I spent the whole race waiting for someone to pass me."

But no one did, and in fact Bunckenberg added another seven minutes to her lead to win by 15min in 4hrs 53min 27secs. This broke the course record held by four-time Coast to Coast champion Jill Westenra and as a member of the local Titahi Bay Surf Life Saving Club, Mana Kayak Racing Club and a third year nursing student at Porirua's Whitireia Polytechnic, Bunckenberg was a popular local winner.

The men's multisport race was a closer battle with Lower Hutt's Jamie Saunders and Wellington's Daniel Bremner racing side by side through the kayak and mountain bike sections before Saunders got away on the mountain run to win by six minutes in 4hrs 23min 57secs. Third placed Angus Hulme-Moir won the award for first Porirua finisher and also first veteran by just 30secs from Matt Penney in 4hrs 38min 53secs.

The Duathlon was won by Wellingtonians Callum Kennedy in 2:58:49 and Jacqueline O'Hagan in 3:40:08.

Onlookers at the finish line of this year's Porirua Grand Traverse could be seen doing a double-take during the afternoon. Prior to Lizzy Bunckenberg's multisport win her twin sister Katherine had been first open women in the mountain run only option in 1hr 57min 35secs; although veteran standout Rachel McKinnon had been the first female finisher overall in 1hr 55min 04secs. For the second consecutive year Wellington's Ben Clendon was fastest among men in 1hr 32min 47secs.

The mountain bike only option went to 20 year old Mansour Youssef in 2hrs 02min 52secs, while first woman was former New Zealand rep Anne Hunn in 2hrs 29min 20secs. The 2015 event also saw the introduction of a paddle-only section that saw K4's, K2's and outrigger canoes joining the traditional multisport boats, with a K4 crew from Mana Kayak Racing Club shugging off the wind and swells for fastest time in 51min 33secs.

A big part of the Porirua Grand Traverse in recent years has been a 7.5k fun run/walk. From modest beginnings of less than 100 starters, this year saw more than 400 people adding to the festival atmosphere. The highlight was local Titahi Bay sisters Jess, Becs and Millie Jenkins taking out the top three female placings. Their efforts helped Raroa Intermediate take out the school team prize as five of their students placed in the top ten places overall. First overall went to Plimmerton father Mark Anderson, whose entire family also took part.