

Jo's Big Adventure

Contributed by Paul Cook
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TRC Member Jo Rowell headed off overseas to compete in the European Masters XC Marathon in Graz, Austria, Sunday 23rd August. This was a supporting event for the World XC Marathon Championships. See below Jo's email not long after the event. Holding a British passport she was able to enter this event and for the record she finished 7th overall female and 4th in her age category.

Jo writes:

Hi all

Well this was the most difficult race I've ever done! I knew the course was going to push me to the extent of my ability and I certainly found it.

I kind of thought - lots of climbing, ok I can do that; lots of descending on what the map called gravel roads - ok I can do that, albeit slowly. Little did I know until Friday that the gravel roads are not really like I'd imagined and the 'cart tracks' we really our equivalent of single track. Guys you'd love it - scared me!

The triple arrow was only used three times but it should have been at least 5 arrows! Needless to say I decided self preservation was the best strategy and walked - or slide down these sections. How can I truly describe these descents - even the ones with no arrows, although they were equally as scary. They were mostly dirt tracks, basically single tracks, through beautiful alpine forests with lovely roots to cross the whole way. Add 24 hours of torrental rain from Friday to early hours Sunday am and a couple of hundred people racing on the course, the gradient of Dave's Drop Off at Illinbah or the hairy twisting descents at D'Agular but oh 3 km long and you're starting to get the picture. So that was one type of descent - and sometimes it started off ok and I thought yep control my speed and I keep my bum back and I can get down here. Then it just got steeper and steeper and slipper and to be honest I just bottled out. I'm relieve to say I wasn't the only one (although I was in the minority!) The final 20km from the 1400 m climb to the top of a cable car were a little different, here you just had rocks! Big bolders, smally slidy rocks, sharp rocks, drop offs - oh yes it was all there. It really was a world class course and if you ever come over to Europe you just must bring your mtb and ride some of this stuff. But the athletes here, the germans, austrians and swiss were awesome to watch then descent these trails was breath taking and scary. As the men had an extra 20km loop to do they eventually caught the women on the second half of the course and as I was struggling to walk down the steeper sections I could hear them coming down so quickly heffed myself and bike off the track and watch them ski - yes pretty much what they did, I'm sure they had some control!

Anyway I made it to the end. Unfortunately I managed to have a dumb fall 2km from the end on the final mud slide descent. Fell hard on my arm and though oh know here we go broken bone. But luckily only a lovely big gash full of dead leaves and earth. Managed to ride to the end and then off in the ambulance to get the wound cleans (yow) and 15 stitches. Great drs and they enjoyed practicing their english on me :)

Well full on adventure. I'll add some pics to my facebook page later. Jack took a lovely close up of the gash :-)

Off to continue our adventure, love to you all

Jo