

# **It Takes a Village to do a Triple IRON Distance Triathlon!**

**Triple IRON Triathlon-Lake Anna State Park 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> October 2004**

**By Christine Couldrey aka Kiwi**

Well, sitting here in front of the computer I realize that it has already been a whole week since Aaron and I were sitting in traffic in my little red truck on our way to Lake Anna State Park in Virginia. And, as I sit here, I realize that I am starting to regain some of the feeling in my toes (although I'm sure it'll be another couple of weeks before the pins and needles go away), I am starting to regain mobility in my right knee despite the fact that it still feels incredibly swollen. Unfortunately, I seem to have lost my brain somewhere on the race course, I am contemplating another trip down there to find it. But despite all of the aches and pains, I also sit here with an incredibly peaceful feeling, knowing that I have completed a race that only a very small handful of people in the world have completed. And know that I have an incredible group of friends: that inspire me, encourage me, and support me, no matter how crazy they think I am!

Here is the story of my Triple IRON distance: starting this race report is daunting, there is so much to write, so many comparisons to make with the Double IRON triathlon I did two years ago, and so many emotions to describe that I worry that I can't possibly do it all justice!

So how did the idea of "doing the Triple" come about? Well, unlike when I did the Double two years ago and I spent 18 months of planning and getting ready for the race, my first thought that I should attempt something as crazy as the Triple came about though the loss of my Red Cross job and start of a new job, and consequently little vacation time. Not only did I spend a number of months not knowing which country I would be living in come October, but that together with the lack of vacation time, made planning for adventure racing difficult, but I still needed a challenge so there was the Triple! No great desire, just the need for a challenge. But then circumstances changed again and I found myself doing some challenging adventure races and I dismissed the idea. Unfortunately things changed again when a teammate messed up his ankle in the Mega Dose and we were forced to quit. I felt like I still needed to face up to another challenge to make up for this bad luck. So about 1 month before the Triple I committed verbally, but it wasn't until about a week before the race that I really mentally committed to this race. This lack of commitment came with many new fears, not only was there the fear of the mental and physical pain, would I cave or not, but now also the fear of, do I want this enough to finish it?"

I felt like I was putting off the packing and sorting of all my worldly possessions that were to accompany me down to the beautiful Lake Anna State Park. Fortunately Aaron was once again going to be in charge of my support crew. We both know the drill for these long distance events, and so not much discussion was really needed, but some TLC was required the Sunday before the race when the realization that I was committed suddenly hit me!

Thursday morning, what seems like every thing I own has been sorted and packed into labeled boxes to make it easy for my support crew to find. I had written up a plan with details of how many calories/hour I needed to eat, how to mix my sports drink, how much I

wanted to sleep, lists of everything I had packed, I think some would call me anal!!!! Work was challenging on this particular day, my mind kept wandering to what lay ahead of me! But finally it was time to go! And with the well wishes of my co-workers (and some discussion as to what would happen if I should end up in hospital) it was time to head down to the lake!

Traffic was horrendous (as usual) and it took longer to make the drive than it should have. Fortunately Aaron took charge and drove, my brain was pretty scattered, trying to work out why I was doing this, how would I deal with it, was I mentally strong enough, and so on.

Race brief time is great at these ultra distance races, with a total of 17 athletes (9 doing the Double and 8 doing the Triple) it's a very different affair from the 100's at most triathlons, folks just gather around and you sense that you are not only in the presence of some incredible athletes, but these are also incredible people. Most of the field was from Europe and so who ever could speak more than one language translated whatever couldn't be understood by other people. I had met the oldest athlete of the field, 67 year old Karl who mainly spoke German, I got to brush up on my German before doing my bit in the translation of the race brief.

Because of the traffic, it was dark before we had a chance to unload the truck and put up the tent. This would have disturbed me 2 years ago where everything had to (and did) run like clockwork. But this was a different race, I was doing it for different reasons, I had different goals, and had experienced a lot of different races since that time. Aaron and I were pretty proud of our efforts at setting up our HQ. We had a tent which bordered onto a canopy! Aaron remarked on how much better our set up got each year and we affectionately christened it "Camp Couldrey". It was around this time that we realized just how many things we had borrowed from our friends, the canopy from the Reston Area Triathletes (thanks a lot), the tent from Aaron's friend, the bike lights from my Adventure racing teammate Caroline (go team Standin), the CD player from my roomie Jen, and the list goes on. And Aaron being Aaron, came out with a classic line "it takes a village to do a Triple Iron Triathlon", that is one of the most accurate statements I have ever heard! And with that it was time for me to go to bed for the last time in 3 days!!!!

Once asleep, I slept surprisingly peacefully, except for when, at around 1am there was a loud banging at the door. I didn't even hear this first time, to me it was just something going on in a dream. But the second time I woke, and some what startled, fortunately it was simply someone who had too much to drink, and upon realizing his mistake yelled "ummmmm guys we got the wrong room". Back to sleep.

Friday morning (finally you all say)

Friday morning comes around and I'm still not really in the spirit, but I go through the motion, breakfast, pack the truck, drive to the race site, unpack, COFFEE, bike check, and trying to talk myself into the mind set for what is about to take place. I'm still scared that I don't want it enough and am worried that because of that I won't have the strength to push through the lows. However, to be honest, I also have proven to myself that once I start, I won't quit, so I was holding onto that. Trying just to think about the first loop of the swim,

and knowing that once I got to a certain point, there would be no quitting. But where would that point be, how much of the race would I need to complete before coming back and doing that all again seemed more hassle than coming back and doing it next year (because we all know that if for some reason I didn't finish, I would be standing on this beach this time next year! Well I guess I would just have to see about that one.

I thought the water was going to be warm enough to swim without a wet suit, I'm not a fan of swimming with a wet suit, but on this very foggy morning, it was cold and the water felt cold, and knowing how long I was going to be spending in the water, I decided to put the wetsuit on, at least to start. Getting hypothermia in the first 4 hours of a race isn't a good plan! So on went the suit, I could always take it off later.

Then, somehow, it was time to line up on the beach. Another thing that I love about these ultras, is that the gun goes (or, more precisely, in this case, Dawn tells us all we can start), there is no mad rush for the water! Everyone says the last well wishes and the two groups (the Double athletes were starting at the same time this year and they were starting at a different point on the lane rope) head quietly down to the water. At this precise time, the excitement of the event hit me, all of a sudden I had this great need to do a Triple Iron distance triathlon. I was excited about it, excited that it was time, and didn't know what I would have done if I couldn't have been starting a Triple at that precise point in time. I took this as a good omen!!!

So the swim, 16 people (one athlete could not start until the next day) swimming around a long lane rope in a mirror like lake covered in fog!! From the first stroke it felt good, it felt smooth, and I couldn't think of anywhere else in the world that I would rather be! My one small worry, I had only swum 10-15 times this year, mostly just a mile at a time with only 4 swims of 5000 yards, how would the arms hold out over 7.2 miles? Well, only one way to find that out, "just keep swimming". That brings me to the next point, as much as I love the movie finding Nemo, I decided that line could get really old, really fast, so I tried to remove it from my mind.

From about the second of 43 laps around the lane rope I decided I was too warm in my wetsuit, but I was still worried about taking it off because my feet were cold. Getting the wet suit back on after I had taken it off wasn't going to be easy, so I decided to swim a little more with it on. There was plenty of time to think about things, and the words of a good friend rang in my head for much of the swim, he had promised to send me good vibes all weekend, and well, I was feeling them the entire time of the swim!!!

The plan had stated that Aaron would walk into the cold water and freeze his wee hiney off every 4 laps, this works well for me in breaking down this large task into little bits, all I had to do was swim 4 laps at a time. unfortunately for Aaron, the fog meant that, not only could the swimmers not see the entire length of the lane rope (and the post that we had to navigate each loop...nearly had a couple of run ins with that), but also the support crew couldn't precisely time their wading out to feed the swimmers, so Aaron had to spend longer in the cold water than necessary (thanks Aaron), but he was always there and waiting for me at the end of the appropriate laps!

At some point (I don't remember when), the fog started to lift, and the true beauty of this spot was once again revealed, I am pleased to say that I even appreciated this. I love this lake, and thought it was pretty cool to be in a race, that even though I was racing as hard as I could, I could still appreciate the beauty of the morning. Then there was some more swimming, my hands started to swell, but I knew from last time, that by clenching my fists each time the hands came out of the water, I could get the fluid to clear from them (at least I learnt something from the Double, even if I didn't learn not to do these crazy things). Then some more swimming. Aaron had said that I was swimming consistently, what did this mean, am I swimming so slowly that that was all the good he could think to say? Maybe, maybe not, something I know is that in these races, your mind is always trying to play games with you, and you need to keep the bad thoughts out of the mind. Aaron probably didn't mean anything with that (Aaron, if you support me in something else in the future, don't think about this bit of the report, say what ever you like).

At some point, the issue that I have in my shoulder that makes it sore to swim even just a short distance, started an added feature. About once a lap it felt as though I was getting an electric shock down the length of my arm. It didn't really add too much to the pain, but was very worrying, there was a long way to go in the race, and this seemed to be causing my thumb to go numb. Oh well, so I swam some more. Still thinking of taking my wetsuit off.

The decision had been made, with the sun out, my reward for swimming 2 Ironman swims was going to be to take off my wetsuit, I still had a number of laps to swim at this point but it's always good to have a goal. Finally that goal came! Now if only we had a video of this little dance: I finish a lap, Aaron unzips me, I (I'm in chest deep water at this point in time) pull off the top part then give it to Aaron, instructing him on pulling as I lie on my back.....so there is me lying on my back, kicking while Aaron pulls at the wetsuit. It worked so well and efficiently, anyone would have thought we had practiced that move!

The cold water felt good on my sore shoulder and arms, but all of a sudden I felt slow. But I just swam some more, convincing myself that this was just because of a different "feel" of the water. Later I was to find out that by taking my wetsuit off my speed has slowed by 10%! To me that is incredible, I now know that wearing a wetsuit makes people faster, but the experts say that the better swimmer you are the less difference it makes. I'm no Olympic swimmer, but I'm a solid 1:08 Ironman swimmer which I think is decent, so it's interesting that the wetsuit would make such a huge difference! I made the right choice taking it off, and when Aaron works up the numbers I'm sure we'll have some great graphs to study! One way I knew that I was slowing was that the other woman doing the Triple (Kathy) caught me and over took me even though I was still putting in the same sort of effort. We ended up finishing the swim at around the same time.

A little under 4 hours and I am done with the 7.2 mile (12km) swim, never swam that far before! In the time that I was swimming, support crew reinforcements had arrived in the form of Andrea (her first time at one of these crazy events) and Andy (a friend of Aaron's). The beach was a very dizzy experience! In the words of my friend Kelly "be careful people, it's a little dizzy here". I remember demanding Andy's shoes from him so that I didn't get my

feet too sandy on the walk (assisted by Aaron and Andrea because I was too dizzy to walk on my own, that wouldn't be the last time I had to hold onto someone during the race) up the beach to my trusty bike!

There was some Ensure consumed, and a sandwich, and I am on my bike. Aaron is such an awesome person, he had even made sure that my bike was in the correct gear to ride up that short sharp hill! Fortunately, the hill that we all hated 2 years ago was not in the loop this year; that pleased me a lot! Well, 67 loops for 336 miles (540km) is a pretty daunting mission (notice how I wasn't even thinking about the Triple marathon that was to follow), but you have to start some where, so I started on the first loop, and put my mind to thinking how much I had enjoyed the swim. It was good to see all the Double athletes out there pedaling. The first loop felt good!!! For the past 2 years I have mainly ridden my mountain bike and think that I had only been on my road bike 7 times this year before the race, and had dramatically altered the seat position on it only weeks before this race (that wasn't quite as stupid a thing to do as it might sound, but still had Aaron and I somewhat concerned.....I was going to monitor the situation). It was hard to go slowly enough on these first few laps, pedaling that bike just felt so good, and my good vibes were coming in strong! I figured that I needed to average about 12 miles an hour for the course to allow a little time to get off and stretch, take a 10 min nap in the night and finish the bike with 26 hours in which to do the run. But I had decided that I was going to use the tried (okay not tried over 336 miles) and trusted 15 mile an hour plan! Ride at 15m/h while it was still light and then went it got dark slow down, and probably stay at that pace when the sun came up the next morning. How crazy is that? To start riding one morning and know that you would still be riding the next morning.

I knocked off a few laps when Aaron informed me that Andy was the official timer (don't you love these races where the support crews get asked to help with putting on the race) and that I was riding faster than anyone else doing the Triple. I thought, oh no, my support crew is on Crack, but remembered the guidelines, Aaron is always right, and so I slowed down some, which I really needed to, because even then I was riding faster than 15m/h. Even now I think that Aaron wasn't completely correct, but who cares, at that time I thought of a race report written by someone I know doing a 100 miler and how, in the final hours of the race, he was convinced that his support crew was lying to him, but his trust in them allowed him to finish under the time limit, the support crew was there to look after you, and I knew that whatever I thought, I was in good hands.

It was fun watching the remainder of the Triple athletes get out on the bike course! One lap after another I knocked them out, thinking only of the next lap, and not letting my mind wonder to how many laps (or hours) I had left. I had planned my first stretch to be at 55 miles, this came very quickly, I felt great so pretty much climbed straight back on. Again, my plan was to play to my strengths, I didn't need to be fast, I just needed to not stop much, and that's what I planed on doing.

Next goal, time for lights, I wasn't going to stop again until it was time for lights. Somewhere during this section, the great excitement wore off. Passing messages between Steve at one end of the bike loop and Dawn at the other broke up the laps and gave me

something to focus on. But I felt great, unlike 2 years ago when the extreme heat beat me up, I was feeling just fine on this day, I hoped that getting through the first day without any dehydration (and believe me I was not dehydrated) or heat issues would serve me well over the next 48 hours (isn't that time crazy, here I have already done all of this and the race will still be going in 48 hours time!).

My friend Caroline went out of her way to come and visit for a couple of hours. It was nice to see her, again it kept the mind busy and I thought about how we had raced together earlier in the year and overcome so many obstacles in that race. But I felt it was time to get some of my support crew some exercise, after all, they are all athletes so they don't just want to sit around all weekend! Andrea came and rode 3 loops with me and we had some lively conversation that totally distracted me from the task at hand, so much so that I forgot to eat at my eating spot each loop and drink at my drinking spots. Fortunately she wasn't going to let me get away with that and reminded me a couple of times. Again, in contrast to 2 years ago, the food and fluids were going down and being absorbed well, I was hungry, I had an appetite and felt like the fueling was going well. Although I have to say that eating every 20 min is quite a challenge!

The sun set and Andrea didn't have any illumination (that and she is tapering for her own big race) so she took a break. I had my lights put on and decided I was going to ride for 2 and a half to 3 hours before I stopped again at which point we would swap out batteries. A lesson I have learnt, the more illumination the better, and I had a lot!!! A couple of the competitors told me later that they had ridden behind me because of my lights!

I figured that when it got dark I would slow down a lot, and from there on I would just be trying to keep the pace up as best I could, especially given the pace I had done earlier. But here I was, riding in the dark still feeling good.....okay, I was waiting for the point to come where just turning the pedals was all that I could do.

Andy joined me for a couple of loops, I think, and then I did some loops on my own, then Aaron came and did some loops. The night sort of runs together, but the time came to change my battery, this was the first point that I realized that this racing was taking its toll. I wanted to be so helpful, but the battery cable was tucked under something and I felt myself getting a bit frustrated and had to be sternly told (well that's how I remember it sounding, it may well not have been) by Aaron that I should leave the Battery to him and Andy....okay, no objection there, I drank more Ensure and headed on my way for another 2 and a half to 3 hours. Not having a helmet light I couldn't see what speed I was going, never mind, it was getting a little harder, but still felt pretty good, turns out later that I really hadn't slowed much at all.

This first night in the Triple is very different to the night that you spend racing in the Double. The night of the Double has the promise of getting off your bike before it gets light, which means that there is that big goal that you are working towards and the faster you ride the less dark you need to ride in. The Triple doesn't have that, when it gets dark, you know that you are going to be riding all night until it gets light. This is a pretty strange feeling,

fortunately it didn't bother me too much; I was still focusing on the lap that I was riding at that particular point in time.

Every loop I was happy to see Dawn sitting at the park gate, and I felt bright and cheery, but as I was out there on my own the sleep monster started to have its way with me.....I so desperately wanted to sleep. I heard someone else singing, and figured that might keep me awake. Now one of the few things I DON'T do is sing in public, and anyone that heard me that night will know why, I can't sing to save myself, but I sang with all gusto, even if I only knew a few words of the song. It helped for a while. Then one lap before my next battery change (this must have been close to midnight on a beautiful starlit night) I started to fall asleep on the bike and nearly ran off the road on a down hill section, that would have been messy! I made a very quick pit stop, informing my support crew that I needed a NoDoz, no, not next round, but now! Wow, that perked me up! It was also great seeing Jen and Kevin who had sat in traffic for many hours to be there.

The wee hours of the morning are always the hardest, and this night was no exception!!! There was some nausea, mostly I think from not having eaten a complete meal all day, a few Pringles and a few mouthfuls of sandwiches helped some, but cycling while completely bent over on the aero bars didn't feel particularly good, so I did what I had to and "said no to vomit"!

Fortunately by this point Andy had slept some, and came out on the bike with me. When Aaron had told him that I would talk through the night, I think he was skeptical, well, I wouldn't say that I did all the talking, but between us we certainly did talk through the wee hours! It was great, before this I hardly knew Andy and he has so many incredible stories and experiences to share, and now he knows all about molecular biology, gene therapy and GenBank! He also promised to take me flying if I finished, I think he thought that I wouldn't remember after the race!!!

The plan had been to take 1 nap of 10 min on the first night. Sleeping at HQ is appealing, in the tent, with a sleeping bag and pillow, but it is also noisy, with 16 athletes on the course there is always something going on. So I decided to sleep on a tarp (the pronunciation of the long version of this word is very different in NZ and the USA). Aaron brought one out to a quiet place on the course and I had a wonderful nap, I felt much better after it and attacked with last 3 hours of darkness with a bit more gusto!

I'm not exactly sure when it happened, but sometime through that night came the point of no return, the point at which I have done enough to know that I need to finish, the point at which after all this effort, not finishing and the thought of having to come back and repeat all that I have done next year seems like a big job. This was a good point to reach, although there were no thoughts of quitting at this point, there was a long way to go, and who knows what experiences would lie ahead. The pre race fears of not wanting it enough were now well behind me. Quitting is not in my nature, and I now figured that once again, whatever lay ahead, I wouldn't be quitting this race. How I was going to finish still wasn't quite clear as the run still worried me, but I could work that out as I went along!

Any ultradistance racer knows the therapeutic value of the new day! This day (Saturday) would be no exception! Andy and I had discussed the coming of the daylight for a couple of laps, had decided which direction east was, and eagerly watched for that first glimmer of light. All of a sudden it was there, and with it came a new lease of life. Although the night hadn't been particularly hard, and the lows weren't particularly low, there were a few laps that really weren't pleasant, and the light put them in the past. Once again I could see my cycling computer, I had felt fairly strong during the night, but was very surprised to see that my average speed had decreased only slightly, wow, now I really was well ahead of schedule. But as it always seems to go, you feel great for a bit and, within minutes things can change!

We were riding along, commenting on how nice it was to be able to see more than just the very small world that the headlamps illuminate, when all of a sudden I had a bad spell, I felt giddy, nauseous, I couldn't see properly, this was bad. It took me a few moments to remember that if I crashed my bike it could go horribly wrong and my race could be over, so I informed Andy that I needed to get off for a moment, I suspected low blood pressure was the cause! Getting off the bike was a relief, at least I wasn't going to crash; all I could think of was lying down, hoping that Andy wouldn't let me sleep. I lay there for just a moment, somehow already in a different world (sleep or fainting I'm not sure) when I heard the click of someone unclipping their foot from the pedal, apparently this person had gone as far as to turn around to ask if I was okay (and I'm not even sure who it was). It's great to know that if something were to go wrong, help would be along soon. The concerned athlete wanted to know if I needed help or if I was just sleeping. After Andy said that I just needed to lie down for a moment the athlete that had stopped said, "okay, well if she's just sleeping that's okay". A few moments later I slowly got to my feet and, feeling much better got back on the bike. It did strike me as somewhat amusing that in this community of people, it's completely natural for people to get off their bikes and lie down on the side of the road to take a nap!!! Ultradistance races really do have an incredible way of simplifying life!

Well, no lasting effects from that little episode, the rest of the ride really runs together, I was on track for an incredible ride. The one highlight of the last few hours was the resetting of my cycling computer. Cycling computers don't have the ability to display two digits, so when they get to 10 hours, they reset the time back to 0. Aaron and I had learnt this while riding our first Double Century. Up until now, I had never seen the computer reset itself twice in one ride! I shared my excitement with Andy as I reset for the second time. Andy didn't seem to quite grasp the magnitude of this, but when I told Aaron, he was suitably envious (personally I think he has a new cycling goal now).

It wasn't until I finished the bike ride approximately 23 hours after I started (27 hours into the race) that I really realized just what an incredible bike ride I had had. It really was the ride of a lifetime. I was steady and consistent, and although the pace that I was riding slowed some, it really hadn't slowed much and I had never experienced any difficulty to turn the pedals. My feet and shoulder had hurt throughout the ride, but that is always the case, however, my back hadn't gotten sore, my legs never hurt or really felt tired, I felt like I belonged on that bike more than anywhere else in the world, turning those pedals was what I did most naturally. Incredibly I had spent less than 1 hour not turning the pedals of the

bike! From here on in the race, so many people commented on my strength as a cyclist, it's always nice to get complements, I myself spent quite a number of hours very excited about the ride that I had had! Furthermore, I also received some compliments on how nice and polite I had been to my support crew and how I had lifted the spirits of people. Ultra distance racing brings out the best and worst in people, and I was pleased to hear that I was being nice to those that were doing me a huge favor!!!

## The Run

And now comes time for the dreaded run! I had done well on the bike not worrying about how many miles/hours I still had to go, but the thought of that 78.6 mile run was always at the back of my mind, trying to come to the front. Running is always hard for me, but it is a challenge I have learnt I am up to, I just am slower and have to work harder at it than many people.

It was quite a relief to have my shoes taken off my sore feet. Aaron gently cleaned my feet (boy did that tickle) applied Hydropel put on new sox (to go with my nice clean clothes (although for the second time in a row Aaron decided to not take up my offer of ...err applying the Vaseline to the bits of me that were chafed...even though the Vaseline tube promised to make me smell baby fresh! what a lie that was!!!)

It was also nice to sit for a few minutes and eat something and change gears. Sitting shouldn't ever last long, and I was up and ready to start the death march .....err I mean run! Starting the run wasn't quite as daunting as I thought that it might be, the main reason for this was that I had gotten off my bike something in the order of 6 hours ahead of schedule and therefore had plenty of time to walk the three marathons. So I started out with the first short lap (0.6 miles), trying not to think of how long it would take, just concentrating on the job that I was doing at the time.

Aaron had started out on the run with me, he wanted to get some time on his feet in training for his superfast ultramarathons, I was pleased that I could help. I spent much of the first lap telling Aaron how I was going to walk the entire run, although my legs hadn't felt tired or hurt on the bike, they weren't very thrilled with the idea of being off the bike!!! Aaron nodded in agreement, know full well that he had is own little plan for me!!!!

Part way into the second lap Aaron suggested that I "run from the gate to that tree" it was a distance of probably 25 yards, but I was definitely in the, doing what I'm told, mode so I ran. EVERY PART OF ME HURT (except my eyebrows), my skin hurt as it moved, my muscles hurt as the pounding shook them, I didn't know how much running I could do. But somehow, as I was having these thoughts, the words that came out of my mouth were "lets run from this leaf to the corner", and so the running began. I ran (if that's what you can call it) nearly 50% of most of the loops from there on. Running the down hills - walking the up hills, designated start and stop points quickly became apparent. I had been third off the bike, I had about a two hour lead on Kathy, but I also knew what a great runner she was, and I fully expected her to catch me. In the light of day, I struggled with the fact that I was moving more slowly than anyone else out there on the run course, I had a few hours on a

few people, but I wondered would they all catch me? I had to keep reminding myself that this race was about me, as long as I finished in under the 60 hours I could be incredibly proud of myself. It was hard to remember that, I had been without sleep for 36 hours, and the brain wasn't as rational about that as it could have been. Also in this lap format style, if you don't stop (this was still my motto), it often appears that people are passing you more often than they actually are, some people move faster and stop more, and some of us move slower and stop less. Aaron spent much time reminding me that one of the reasons these people were catching me was because I was off the bike so many hours ahead of when I thought I would be, I knew that was a great point, but somehow I couldn't seem to get it to stick!

An intermediate goal became to finish the first marathon before dark, my reward, would be to make a phone call to a friend that had wanted to come and watch but wasn't able to. Not only that, but when I finished my first 13 laps, my support crew all came out in force to have a little celebration with me!! That was nice, but unfortunately my friend Woody wasn't answering his phone, I thought about him partying at the wedding that he had to go to, how different his weekend was to mine!

One more lap and the next one it would start to get dark. I left HQ in the light and returned in complete darkness. It was amazing just how fast I could go into a bad spell. Coming back to camp in the dark, it looked so different, there were so many lights, there were so many people that I stopped in my tracks just yards before the turnaround where I needed to call my number and have my time taken. All of a sudden I no longer knew where the turn around point was, I didn't know where Camp Couldrey was, it was very distressing, and some tears were shed. Fortunately the Adventure racer of the support crew (Kevin) took charge and guided me to the turnaround, physically turned me around and told me that we were just going to keep walking and it would be okay.

Fortunately I recovered from that pretty well, partly because, with the dark had come a much awaited 10 min nap. Off went Team Couldrey into the dark to the right hand turn where the tarp awaited. With this much of a crowd other racers saw us and stopped to enquire if I was okay, so the 10 min rest didn't feel as rejuvenating as I had hoped. But apparently I had snored during this time (despite sleeping on my side) so I must have slept. Anyway, it was just nice to lie down! The nap was all too short, and before I knew it Aaron was once again lifting me (by this point standing up and lying down were things my muscles were no longer able to do alone) and I was back on my feet continuing on in the lap. As would become habit, naps were followed by pudding eating (one of my favorite ultradistance foods). A pot of pudding and the running (well shuffling really) started again.

Around this point in time I learnt that I can still understand and speak German despite of incredible fatigue! Karl had stopped me on one of his last laps, we chatted briefly and I promised to translate his thanks to everyone at the awards dinner the next evening. Having to think in German apparently was a good way of waking my brain, well at least for the next 30 min or so!

The next period is somewhat of a blur, I told some of my support crew that they needed to go to sleep. I was so envious of them being able to sleep that it was almost too much for me to see them ALL not sleeping. Aaron and Jen did some laps with me and around this time Jen realized her ability to know what her roomie wanted to eat even before the roomie knew it!!! Aaron did some very hard loops with me, I was tired, my feet hurt, my knees hurt, I was starting to get some blisters (I awoke George, who kindly took care of them even though my feet must have smelt pretty rank). There were plenty of hallucinations of school busses, Muppets, railings across the road and the yellow line in the road being a ramp that I had to walk up!! I kept on walking, shuffling. I slept another 10 min, apparently this time I had made some grunting moaning noises indicating that I was experiencing some very deep sleep.

Then more shuffling until the time came where the pain in my feet was just too much and I needed to have an extra sit down. This bothered me, I may not be the fastest ultradistance runner around, but I kind of pride myself on not having to stop much. But at this point, I had decided that an extra few min off my feet might do me the world of good! I was complaining, more to myself than Aaron (who by this time had almost completed 2 marathons with me despite some ankle issues he was having) that I wasn't being tough enough, because in my mind at that point in time, I wasn't. What I didn't realize, was how much time the other athletes were spending off their feet too. Aaron told me not to be so hard on myself, I wanted to put up a fight and argue with him, but I didn't have the mental energy for that, so instead, when we got back to Camp Couldrey, my emotions were released through a few tears. Not many, but enough to reset the brain.

I think it was this lap that Andy had woken from his sleep and gave me THE MOST WONDERFUL foot massage I have ever had!!! He commented on the smelly feet and said that, unlike prior to the run, he wouldn't be sniffing my shoes now! Andy came out for some laps, these were perhaps the most mentally and physically challenging laps of the whole race. The pains in my body seemed to cycle through, sometimes my feet hurt, sometimes my chafing caused me distress and sometimes my knee went from being only sore when I had stopped and was restarting to constant pain. Two laps into my third marathon I thought my running for the race was over, the pain in my right knee had escalated beyond belief, it went from feeling "as swollen as Mikes thigh" (you had to be there to get that joke) to feeling as though the knee cap was going to pop out of the side of the knee. I resigned myself to walking the rest of the way, one of the other Triple athletes was already on that plan due to some nasty muscle damage, and I recalculated how long it was going to take on the new plan.

In addition to how slow waking is, walking has another distinct disadvantage over running, it's so much easier to fall asleep while walking, and the desire to sleep is so much greater. At this point, most of the athletes had a support person either guiding, or at least making sure that their competitor wasn't going to walk off the road or fall asleep and fall, there was much hand holding (literally) as we all (including some of the most incredible athletes in the world) struggled with this second night of sleep deprivation. After the race was over I wondered why the struggling of ALL the athletes was so pronounced this year? I have been at this race 5 times now and never seen it, the conclusion that I came to was that usually at

this point the Double athletes are on their first night, this year with all the athletes starting at the same time there were only Triple athletes left on the course! I was quite an experience to be a part of that.

At some point I decided that I could try shuffling again, and it worked, when I shuffled I was okay, but walking the up hills I still needed to hold Andy's arm to keep on track. Andy tells me I alternated between apologizing for falling asleep on his arm (my head on his shoulder) and trying to convince him that I really could walk while I was sleeping!!! And so on we went, shuffle, walk, shuffle, waiting for daylight, hoping that it would rejuvenate me! Making plans that I would take a break every 2 laps.....as Andy put it, that plan never saw the light of day!!!

Just before the day started to break I found out that Kathy and I were on the same lap (I had expected that she would be well ahead of me). Well I thought, she was in a pretty bad state, I never really came into this race wanting to win, I just wanted to do it for me, but if I have a chance, I really should take it. So I started picking up the pace. I figured, if Kathy was too tired to run well I would have a shot of winning, if she wasn't she would start to run and we would both finish faster, it was a win win situation. So the dawn of the third day of the race saw a considerable amount of competitiveness between these 2 women that, only 20 min earlier had looked like death warmed over. Can you believe that, after racing continuously for 48 hours, we both decided that the race was now on!!! Kathy is a far superior runner to me and ran some super fast laps, I put in my fastest laps of the race, amazing Andy who wasn't quite sure what to do with this transformation! 20 miles to go and I was feeling mentally completely different than with 20 miles to go in the Double. I would say that the pain was the same (although that is hard to judge) my ability to mentally just take 1 lap at a time and "just continue on until I was done" was so much better.

Aaron took over from Andy again so that he could get in his 100km on his feet. The sun came up and started to get warm and all of a sudden with about 14 miles to go came the point that I love in every race.....the point at which you KNOW you are going to finish!!!! I savored the moment forgetting just how hard those last miles would get!! Andrea came out for a couple of laps and I need to apologize to her for being a little short with her, I was so intricately consumed with my race and the way I felt and the need to be finished, that my brain was like that of a small self absorbed child, I couldn't comprehend much of what was being said on those laps, I was selfish, all I was concerned about, all I could think about for those last laps was me.

Then there were just 4 laps, and the sun! The crazy thing was, at this point, I had come a lot further than my car can go on one tank of gas but those last 8 miles seemed endless! I knew I would make it, but for some reason the further I went, the further I felt like I had to go. So I walked some, and I shuffled some and I was glad when the bits that hurt me the most shifted spots. And I informed Aaron that our favorite saying "the last few miles are always going to suck" held true for a Triple IRON distance triathlon. I told a few people that this race was just "too far" and I wouldn't recommend doing it.

And then, not really all of a sudden, I was done! The peace that came with that was incredible, it wasn't the elation of finishing the Double, it was something much deeper. I realized; that I had really wanted to do this, I had really needed to do it, and now I had done it! Even a week later, I feel like I don't have to test my limits any more, I now know that those limits pretty much don't exist. I'm sure that at some point the body would break and prevent further forward motion, but I don't really feel the need to find out where that is. Also the peace comes from knowing that I have entered a very small group of elite athletes that know what it is like to do a Triple IRON distance race. It's a crazy sport and I wouldn't necessarily recommend it, but for me, it was something I had to do for peace of mind!

I keep trying to compare my experiences in the Double and Triple, but the experiences, as I have tried to illustrate in this book, are so vastly different that it really is like comparing apples and oranges. Physically I survived the Triple better, but I think that the amount of pain I experienced was probably more in the Triple, but I am a different athlete these days, the Double was my first ultra, now I have adventure raced for more than 3 continuous days, I have trained harder, pushed myself further, and really just have 2 more years of experience. So it would be unfair to compare the two races. Although unfortunately, doing the Triple makes the Double seem short and I feel that I may need to do that again, but first my support crew needs to rest.

I can't thank everyone that came down and supported me enough. It really does take a village to do a Triple!!! I owe you all so much! Thank you. And to all the people out there, the competitors and the staff and their support crews, you all turned this into an amazing event.

If you have made it this far, CONGRATULATIONS! This doesn't really do the emotions and feeling justice, but for me a least (and I hope for those that were there) it'll serve as a reminder what a weekend that was!

For more information on the Double IRON or Triple IRON Triathlon – please visit [www.USAUltraTri.com](http://www.USAUltraTri.com), email Steve Kirby at [steve@USAUltraTri.com](mailto:steve@USAUltraTri.com) or call (757) 430-8021.