

THE TWO-DAY, 238.8 KILOMETRE PASTA PARADISE



by Rob Greenaway

Back in the 1960s, when the Coast to Coast wasn't even a twinkle in a house painter's eye, a British chap called Austin Mitchell (then an academic and commentator temporarily resident in Dunedin—now a British MP), penned a perceptive analysis of the idiosyncrasies of we residents. Called *The Half Gallon, Quarter-acre Pavlova Paradise*, it highlighted the insecurities of New Zealanders at that time—our need for international recognition to bolster our fledgling sense of self-worth. Mitchell might as well have been living in God's Own in the 1990s since not that much has changed if the Coast to Coast's (and the media's) pre-occupation with "international" competitors is a measure.

The fact is the Coast to Coast is an excellent event, however many internationals it attracts. However, this year much was made of the "record number" of overseas competitors (55) reported to have competed in the 1997 event. For a sport that has to work hard to get thorough media coverage, that sort of record is needed to illustrate the significance of the activity, so it's a necessary brag. But, like any record, it depends on how you measure it.

The Christchurch Press measures it by the list faxed to the media by the event publicists. The paper reported that Kiwis Blair Stuthridge and Hamish Hamilton were being closely pursued by South African doctor Sandy Inglis and Welshman Steve John in the two day individual event. Steve John has proved he's a dedicated Coast to Coaster by competing in every event since 1989, bar the 1991 race. Being resident in New Zealand for almost a decade hasn't dulled his Welsh accent, but it has dulled Judkins' interest in giving him an assured entry in the international ranks—he ended up on the waiting list this year (but still swelled the number of quoted "internation-

als"). Inglis is closer to being an international, having lived in Canterbury for only three years.

Now, I'm not out to make it difficult for "internationals" to obtain one of the handful of entries reserved for them on the event's waiting list: we know entries are hard to come by. Anyway, the origin or residence of sportsmen and women is no longer relevant in international competition, whether they be European skiers representing New Zealand, Pacific Island rugby players in England, or Welshmen at the Coast to Coast.

Also, if you were processing entries to the event, where would you draw the line? Let's take some case studies randomly selected from the finish chute at the end of day one at Klondyke.

John Walker—not "the", but "a". He's an Australian competitor, but fortunately he's retained his Auckland accent, having lived in Manly for only the past four years—similarly his team-mate David Upton. They came over specially for the event.

Tony Greening, a dentist from the USA. "I married a younger woman, so I have to do these things to keep up with her," he

theorises, even though she's only one year younger. Tony remembers his father's stories of the Mingha and the Esk—areas the musterer knew well. When one of Tony's patients in Pasadena showed him a Coast to Coast brochure, the memories of his childhood in Springfield returned, and so did he.

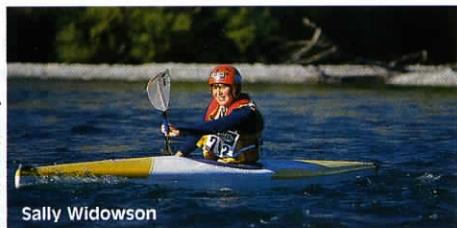
Clement Quinn of Ireland—better known as Dusty—first learned about the Coast to Coast from an in-flight magazine while en route to New Zealand from Singapore, six years ago. I had to ask the Dunedin-based physio what he thought of New Zealand—what Austin Mitchell refers to as "question number one" for all international visitors, or immigrants. "Great place," he replied. "I understand Aotearoa means "big playground".

Sally Widowsen, a Scottish doctor—with a wonderful way of rolling her 'r's in the word "polypro"—is a habitual New Zealander on her fourth visit to this country,



Rob Greenaway

Dusty Quinn at Klondyke



Sally Widowson



Scott Tebbutt
Klondyke

currently on a two year contract. She teamed up with Scottish friend Gillian Kirkwood who's here for just seven weeks, ostensibly to give Gillian a chance for retribution for a particular event in Scotland. The story goes that Sally entered a multisport event, and decided it was such a good idea all her friends should do it as well. Sally then ruptured her Achilles' tendon, but decided she could still do the kayaking. On race day the weather was so horrendous the kayaking was cancelled, leaving Sally's colleagues to drag themselves through the remaining disciplines on Scotland's stormiest day of the year.

Gillian is an absolutely, no arguments about it, international participant, so I asked her if she was representing her country. "No", she replied, "I'm competing for myself."

She competed in the first Scottish Coast to Coast in 1995 and suggests that this year's event—in August—will either launch the race into as enduring fame as its Kiwi parent, or see it slide into obscurity. The race, with a similar price tag to Judkins' event, did not appear to deliver full value in its first year, but the organisation has improved and entries doubled last year to around 130. She suggests that the prize of entries in the Scottish race for the winners of the NZ one day event—Steve Gurney and Andrea Murray—is "not good for Scottish competitors. The standard of competition is not so high as in New Zealand."

Scott Tebbutt, a British individual competitor and an Otago University research fellow, admits he's from Canterbury—the city lying near the Great Stout River, not the region bisected by the Waimakariri. He's spent the past two years living in Dunedin (and there's only one of those according to my atlas) identifying sheep which carry the gene that causes cystic fibrosis.

Scott, along with his Canadian university colleague and law lecturer John Terry, competed to help raise awareness and money for cystic fibrosis. So, they weren't competing for themselves—how about their countries?

Scott: "Don't think so. Maybe I'm representing the medical foundations that flew me here, but John would be representing Canada in theory, wouldn't you John?" John: "No."

Scott first saw the event on Sky television in the UK, although it was John who convinced him to compete, for the sake of some company. John knew Scott was a gear freak and would give good guidance on what to purchase or rent. John leaves New Zealand in June after two years living at Macandrew Bay with his family, and will no doubt find the shift to downtown Toronto a bit of a change. He believes that although there is a lot of commonality between Canada and New Zealand in terms of our treatment of open space, the Coast to Coast is a truly Kiwi thing.

"Your unique ability to sit down and think of the most outrageous course for an outdoor event is reflected in how well New Zealanders do in multisport endurance events offshore—the Eco Challenge, for example."

And Scott, what do you think of New Zealand?

"Stunning place. The beer's not too good though, even if you warm it up."

I have an idea that would reduce the confusion over who's an international. If they are the type of person who enters the Coast to Coast for the experience, let's call them honorary New Zealanders—whether or not they be residents already. They all deserve to be formally associated with a country that Austin Mitchell suggests is, "as near to a people's paradise as fallible humanity is likely to get."