

BEST MOMENTS FROM CAIRNS AIRPORT ADVENTURE FESTIVAL

22 Jun, 15 by [Fiona Harper](#)

The Cairns Airport Adventure Festival wrapped up on Sunday 14 June after an action packed ten days of adrenaline-fueled fun. Locals came out to support over 6,000 athletes who travelled from all points across the globe. It's no wonder that Cairns is developing a reputation as the Adventure Sports Capital of Australia as competitors from elite pros to novice newbies gave it everything they had. And then some.

The festival kicked off on Sunday 7 June with a number of events converging on Four Mile Beach at Port Douglas.

The RRR Mountain Bike Challenge race celebrated its 25th year as the longest running point to point race in the country. There were spills and sweat aplenty, even the odd tear but mostly it was wide-faced grins from ear to ear on 700 riders' faces. Especially on the final beach leg with a 25 knot tailwind up the clacker!

With two course lengths of either 35km Classic or 70km Endurance, the highlight for most riders is the famous Bump Track. Starting from Wetherby Station on the Atherton Tablelands, this route takes riders on a thrilling ride through rural farmland and lush rainforest before ending on the firm-packed sand of Four Mile Beach, Port Douglas, which accounts for the three R's.

On the short course, Dominic Hoyal won the Men's race in 1h10m29s while Sharon Hoey took out the Women's event in 1h30m48s. On the long course, Daniel Rubach won for the blokes in 2h44m11s and Ruth Corset edged out a determined field in 3h17m43s.



The RRR celebrated its 25th year with over 700 riders. Photo [Travel Boating Lifestyle](#)

The weather Gods conspired against competitors who gathered at dawn on Four Mile Beach for the Coral Coast 5150 triathlon. Almost 500 athletes lined up for three events, 5150, Sprint and Enticer covering three distances. With a blustery south easterly blowing dogs off chains, organisers took the safety option and cancelled the swim leg, replacing it with a second run leg for the run/bike/run course.

James Cunnama from South Africa hit the beach hard on his first visit to TNQ, dominating the 5150 field in 1h33m21s. West Australia's Katey Gibb was hot on his tail for the women, finishing in 1h45m34s. Both looked in fine form in the lead up event to the following weekend's IRONMAN and IRONMAN 70.3 events.



Photo credit: koruptvision // IRONMAN Asia-Pacific

Out on the water almost 200 paddlers were doing it tough in the Hekili Great Barrier Reef Ocean Challenge. Launching themselves from Yorkeys Knob in a 30 – 35 knot south easterly for the 45km slog to Port Douglas, it was a rough ride. The upside to the strong winds was a following sea for the most part. Despite its reputation as Australia's longest, most grueling iron event, there's the consolation of paddling probably Australia's most scenic coastal course with a backdrop of rainforest-clad mountain ranges.

Navigating watercraft that varied from super swift surf skis and Stand Up Paddle (SUP) boards, canoes and outriggers, competitors were deservedly welcomed ashore at Four Mile Beach like heroes.

First timer Danny Topfer was first ashore on his ski in 2h58m26s while Peter Dorries steered his outrigger ahead in the OC1s master men's division to come in at 3h14m58s. Open paddler Hope Grunfeld led the women onto the beach in a time of 3h45m24s. There were plenty of other winners on the day well beyond the elite few who claimed podium finishes with the GBROC living up to its grueling reputation. Luckily there was plenty of chilled beer flowing freely on the lawns of the surf club.



Photo credit: koruptvision // IRONMAN Asia-Pacific

Green Island is well known for the sparkling waters and fringing coral reef that surround the tiny coral atoll off the coast of Cairns. Dodging turtles in the water while snorkellers and divers lapped up the views of kaleidoscopic coral nearby, swimmers did a lap around the buoys on one of the prettiest ocean swim courses in the country at the Quicksilver Reef Swim – Green Island.

Blake Kappler claimed the podium in the men's 1.5km swim at 22m19s by a mere second while the 3km swim was even closer with the judges unable to split Matthew Pegg and Eric Watson on a time of 40m36s. The women's events were hotly contested too with Kaya winning by a whisper at 24m55s and Ahlanna Hayes taking out the 3km with a little over one second's grace.

The Cairns Post Bright Night Run is fun addition to the festival where over 1500 colourfully decked out runners and walkers took on the 5km Esplanade course. Despite grey skies and liquid starshine (ok, call it rain if you must), the mood was festive, electric even, and very colourful. Technicolor tutus dominated as entrants took the fun colour theme to heart. Serial high achiever Phil Bradshaw, claimed the podium for the fourth year running with a time of 16 min 10 sec. Congratulations again Phil!



Photo credit: koruptvision // IRONMAN Asia-Pacific

Cool overcast conditions didn't deter the families who turned out on the Cairns Esplanade for the Cairns Ironkids Triathlon, nor the 3,000 odd spectators who clapped and cheered like crazy in support of future Ironmen and women. In a nice touch several pro competitors took time out to hand out finisher's medals, no doubt inspiring these kids to reach for the stars.



Photo credit: koruptvision // IRONMAN Asia-Pacific

The signature event for the festival are the Cairns Airport IRONMAN and the Flight Centre Active Travel IRONMAN 70.3 events. Both events encapsulate the highlights of Tropical North Queensland, passing through some of the region's most beautiful spots. Supporters lined the route to see Aussie Sam Appleton win the shorter event strongly in a time of 3h48m54s after a 1.9km swim, 90km ride and 21.1km run. Sunshine Coast based Swiss star Caroline Steffen led the field early to win in 4h19m20s.



Photo credit: koruptvision // IRONMAN Asia-Pacific

In the longer distance it was a case of déjà vu as 2013's male and female winners took the podium again. Liz Blatchford continued her dominance as soon as she hit the water at Palm Cove and rarely looked troubled to finish in 9h11m49s. Luke McKenzie got off to a slow start but was little troubled and was first home in 8h18m01s.



Photo credit: koruptvision // IRONMAN Asia-Pacific

While there was deservedly plenty of focus on the pro elite athletes at the head of the pack in all events, the success of the Cairns Adventure Festival is due in many ways to the number of age-group competitors who throw themselves into the challenge. For these thousands of weekend warriors most have few aspirations beyond clutching a coveted finisher's medal. Watching their achievements from the sidelines are one of the most inspiring elements to this fabulous event and we can't wait to see them line up again when the festival starts again on 5 June 2016.

Were you in Cairns or Port Douglas to compete, or as a supporter? Tell us about your own Cairns Adventure Festival experience in the comments below.

Fiona Harper is Cairns based travel writer. Widely travelled, highly acclaimed and much published, Fiona's articles & images are published across the globe. When she's not writing about TNQ she's probably running a marathon or exploring the world by foot, bike, kayak, camel or boat: whatever mode of transport she can get her hands on!