

Top internationals to vie for women's Lake to Lighthouse

For three years, Elina Ussher has downed her rivals to win the women's title in the Genesis Energy Lake to Lighthouse Challenge, a multisport event around Lake Waikaremoana and then down to Wairoa on the Hawkes Bay coast.

Win number four? That could well be the toughest yet? Because, from the invigorating climes of Queenstown and Christchurch, to the heat of Mt Isa in Australia, others are training, racing - and looking ahead.

When Ussher (from Finland living in Nelson), lines up in Tuai, near Lake Waikaremoana, for the start of two days of sensational running, mountain biking and kayaking (18-20 November 2011), she'll be elbow-to-elbow with Brazil's Camila Nicolau, Christchurch's Sia Svensden, and Australia's Alison Whitehead, with more top women expected enter before the event.

Danish-born Cantabrian Svensden placed third in the 2010 Lake to Lighthouse, but for Nicolau and Whitehead this will be their first taste of the mighty northern-Hawkes Bay race.

"My goal will be to finish and I think by doing that I will have a good result," reflects Nicolau. "New Zealand has the best multisport women and I know that they will be all there. I will not have the fastest run, that's for sure!"

Nicolau was seventh (2010) and eighth (2011) in the one-day Coast to Coast, and third in July's 3D Rotorua Australasian multisport championships (behind winner Elina Ussher). She is also three-time champion of Multisport Brazil and placed third at the National Cyclocross Championships recently.

Nicolau is currently living in Queenstown, working part time at Outside Sports, and being coached by her boyfriend Cam Carter.

"The training here is awesome but it's very cold for a Brazilian," she says. The snow has meant a fair bit of training indoors on the rollers — and snowboarding two times a week. She'll race in the Peak to Peak (August) then start building up for the Lake to Lighthouse.

"I think the challenge [of L2L] motivates me and this race will give me some good experience for the next ones," she says. "Maybe it's my little devil inside me because my little angel is a bit afraid!"

Like Ussher, Svensden will have the advantage of familiarity with the Lake to Lighthouse's huge 46 km run.

"To have a race which includes a Great Walk is amazing. The views from Panekiri Bluff are so rewarding. I would like to feel that I have better fitness going into the race and with such a long run — a consistent run would be an aim," Svensden says.

She credits a number of people with supporting her recently, including kayak coaching from Jan Kees of JKK racing Kayaks.

The Christchurch based multisporter is looking forward to the challenge. "The Maori culture that the community brings, along with the shared meals and entertainment, and all the

competitors, makes the experience,” Svensden says.

Australian Alison Whitehead completed the first three XPD Adventure Races in Australia, but hasn't done a multisport race for a few years. She reckons she won't be up with the elites: “my best result is to finish with a smile on my face ... my goal is to finish”.

But she's tackled some impressive enduro events, such as the Alice Springs MTB Enduro, Trans-Rockies MTB in Canada, and Northface 100 running race.

“A friend told me to watch the Lake to Lighthouse - WOW the scenery blew me away, the disciplines are all fun and there are not thousands of people competing,” she enthuses.

Whitehead lives in Mount Isa. Where? “A small town hundreds of kilometres from anywhere. There are no hills and no races, but I have friends to run with on a Saturday morning, a husband who pushes me on the MTB and a lake to paddle on — what more can I ask for!”

In the men's Genesis Energy Lake to Lighthouse, Nelson's Richard Ussher and Trevor Voyce (first and second in 2010), and Australian Multisport Champion Jarad Kohlar will lead the challenge. Kohlar competed in 2010, but faded on the run.

Like the women's field, other top men have indicated they will compete. Sam Clark, third in 2010 and fifth in this year's Coast to Coast, is sure to be in the mix.

As well as the main event, race director Chris Joblin has announced two new options for 2011.

“The Genesis Energy Lake to Lighthouse Challenge is a tough event, requiring considerable fitness and commitment. While the race attracts the multisport elite, we also want to provide more accessible options,” Joblin explains.

The Waikaremoana Classic and Duathlon will be held on 18 November 2011. Like the main event, the 42 km Classic will start in Tuai, dishing up a 15 km mountain bike ride, a 12 km loop kayak on the lake, and a 15 km run across the Ngamoko range back to the start. The 30 km Duathlon leaves out the kayak stage. Both are open to individuals and relay teams, with age group and iwi categories.

“Last year we had 40 entrants from Wairoa [in the main event],” says Joblin. “We believe the Waikaremoana Classic and Duathlon will open up multisport to many more, with options for anyone with a basic level of fitness and entry fees starting from \$45 per individual.”

Get full information and enter at www.laketolighthouse.co.nz

By Jim Robinson

For further details, photos or quotes please contact the event director -

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