

THE ONE THAT STARTED IT ALL,

THE RRR

RURAL, RAINFOREST AND REEF

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Mountain biking in Australia is still in its infancy and, relatively speaking, is still developing its own heritage. During the early years it was seen as an extreme sport for the lunatic fringe. However, with the birth of IMBA and dedicated and passionate mountain bike clubs springing up everywhere, the sport made an important transition and established itself as legitimate, here to stay and accessible to many.

Of course, more recently the sport has seen an explosion in popularity, especially in endurance and stage racing formats. The sport is becoming so popular that demand for entries often sends online registration systems into meltdown. Gone are the days where you struggle to find events to compete in... now the battle is getting a spot in one of the many available!

One of the events that helped start it all is the RRR. Held in Port Douglas, Far North Queensland, the RRR is reputed to be the oldest point to point enduro in Australia, and this year celebrated the 20th years since its

Anyway, I digress, the RRR starts at Mt Molloy, nestled in the mountains high above Port Douglas. From there racers descend through incredible rainforest before finishing on the spectacular 4 mile beach at Port Douglas. The RRR stands for Rural, Rainforest, and Reef as it celebrates the diversity of landscape used in the race.

The race was founded in 1990 by two legends of the sport, Glen Jacobs and Peter Blakey when the pair set out to hold an event which featured the historic Bump Track. The Bump Track was originally used by the Aborigines as a coastal access trail and was later used by the first settlers in the area to access the tablelands from Port Douglas. It has changed over the years, but one thing has remained a constant - it is seriously steep and fast on a bike!

The idea was to have a XC enduro, with a frightening section of downhill to challenge a rider's bravery and skill. With a region that at one time boasted 60 downhill trails within 50km of Cairns, such a trail was not hard to find. The Bump Track is now the spectacu-

the bullocks needed a rest! Thanks to the Bump Track, the RRR is one of the few point to point enduros that features an overall negative gradient, despite the fact that the course features plenty of climbing before hitting the Bump Track.

Mountain Bike technology has come a long way in 20 years, which was clearly evident when a couple of crazy old timers showed up at the 2010 event with the same bikes they used to ride the first event 20 years ago! The Bump Track is challenging enough with dual suspension and disc brakes so it was a credit to their skills (or perhaps an indication of early onset dementia) that these guys emerged unscathed at the bottom of the Bump Track and made it to the finish line.

My first experience of the Bump Track was during my first RRR. I was hurtling down the trail, trying desperately to keep the bike from going into orbit off some seriously steep water bars, when I saw some movement ahead of me beside the trail. I managed to sneak a quick glance as I hurtled past and realised that it was rider who had come to grief.



inception. While many modern-day enduro riders would not have heard of the RRR, it has a rich history with many famous names featuring on its start lists: Cadel Evans, Sean McCarroll, Michael Honning, Chris Kovarik, Mick Hannah... to name just a few. These guys helped put mountain biking on the map in Australia and were pioneers when downhill bikes were just cross country bikes with the seat lowered.

lar centrepiece of the RRR. It is an amazing 7km downhill trail through some of the most spectacular rainforest in Australia, not that the views are easy to take in with that tunnel of trail racing toward you.

There is one section of the Bump Track called Slaty's Pinch that is so steep, that when the early pioneers used bullock trains to climb it, someone had to follow behind with large logs to chock the wheels when

Two images stick in my head from this quick glance. The first was a guy bandaging himself, and the second was lots and lots of blood.

Despite the horror that I had taken in, I was unable to stop so after getting spat out at the bottom, I stopped to inform a marshal that a rider that was down. Moments later, much to our amusement, what looked like a mummy riding a bike came speeding past, his bandages fluttering in the breeze, yelling,

"Yee-haw, gotta love the Bump!!"

The RRR began with a handful of riders and has now grown to a maximum of 400 riders. It has followed a similar course over the years, with distances varying from 30km to 60km. Although not boasting epic distances, the amount of climbing leading up to the Bump Track combined with the adrenaline overload and relief at being in one piece after descending it, make this a very challenging course. Throw in the high humidity of a typical North Queensland day and a 7 kilometre stretch of beach leading to the finish and it's no wonder that the RRR has stood the test of time and is earning a reputation as one event you just have to do.

The winner of the RRR has to earn their victory and the 2010 edition of this race was to be no different. Constant rain in the lead up made it one of the muddiest races in recent memory (isn't it nice to have a race which has been going so long that people can't actually remember every detail of previous editions?!). Most riders crossed the finish line unrecognisable, dressed in muddy disguises. Surprisingly, the Bump Track had been spared most of the rainfall and was the notoriety climbs leading up to and over Bells Hill claimed many victims and were the biggest obstacle of the day.

The challenging nature of the course sorts out the contenders from the pretenders and



this year saw three riders emerge to fight out the finish. The three riders hit the beach together for the last couple of kilometres and fight for glory was on! The trio pushed the pace to over 50km/hr along the wet sand, before Townsville youngster, 17 year old Nelson Tilley overpowered three-time winner Dave Wood and Cairns local Mark Viney to get the win. It was the youngster's first major win and an incredible effort in such trying

circumstances.

The 20th anniversary running of the RRR was an outstanding success. With a record field and incredible prize list (featuring 3 quality mountain bikes) the race is only growing. And why wouldn't it? The RRR is being run in May 2011, if you want to be part of history or just want to conquer one of the toughest races out there...get involved.

ENDURO

To left :: Nelson Tilley held off Dave Wood and Mark Viney for his first senior win, a huge victory for the 17 year old Townsville rider