

Escape from Alcatraz 2008.

Getting there

After not training for most of 2007, Goggo and I decided to go and support Lee and Paul whilst doing the long course at Gerardmere, because we were camping on the lake I decided to take my wetsuit as well as my bike. I read the race info whilst bored on the Friday, and noticed the Olympic on the Sunday, so asked Lee to see if there were any spaces left when they went to register, there were.

Sunday came, the swim was as normal, then came the bike 15-20% climbs 3 laps of pain, Chris and Laura will vouch for that after competing their this year (not a normal Olympic by any standard) and the steepest flat run ever, amazingly I had qualified for Alcatraz.

Alcatraz

I arrived in San Francisco three days before, collected my hire bike, and nearly came off at the first junction (the brake levers are the other way round!).

The next morning I decided to see what the water was like, 11 degrees (it hurt).

The race briefing was great; they told you about the sharks, the current and to be in transition at 4.30, so they can bus 1623 people to the boat.

Race day

We boarded the boat at 7am, and the 15m trip took 40min, with 1800 people on board in wetsuits, it wasn't fun, as we swung around the island everybody moved too the left to look and I thought the boat was going to go over.

During the briefing we had been told that they would call each category in turn but when the horn sounded it was bedlam, people just piled out of the door, and jumped eight ft of the side, as you hit the freezing water, you just panic about the cold and being hit, eventually you manage to breath and start the long swim, 1.5 miles isn't bad normally but combined with 11deg, a massive swell, eight mph cross current and 1623 others, its tough,

If you hit the right beach (I did), you then have a mile to run to transition with feet you can't feel.

The bike is only eighteen miles but tough, the scenery is great, but the Americans can't steer round corners, watch out.

The run is a tough eight that climbs up to golden gate bridge, back down to the shore then up the sand Ladders, 400 vertical steps up the cliff with sand deeper than your feet on them, then back up to the bridge and sprint for home.

2hrs 51 and 384th, not bad for a qualification only race, probably equates to 2.15 on a standard Olympic distance, but with more smiles.

If you manage to qualify, do it! When you're in the water take a second too roll on your back and look at the island and remember the thousands of supporters are there to see you finish or die (the atmosphere is like an ironman without going through quite as much pain)