

# Report from the Field 16/04/03

Race director Geoff Hunt has just completed his first reconnaissance of the region's wilderness areas. He has come back excited by the diversity in the Otago coastal landscape.

## **Coasteering**

At 46 degrees South, 171 degrees East Otago is deep in the Southern Ocean and we have taken this opportunity to introduce a new discipline to the Southern Traverse - Coasteering. We define coasteering as 'travelling between the low tide mark and the top of the beach zone' ie generally within 50-100 metres from the waterline.

During the checkouts we have explored the inviting sandy beaches and sheltered coves, walked across rough rocky and seaweed slippery shorelines, passed through many seal colonies, and saw the occasional penguin and sea lion. We swam through tidal pools and around sheer 100 metre rock cliffs, we then clambered out of the swells through the bull kelp back up on to the shore.....it was fantastic. This section will be remembered as one of the most challenging sections and a highlight of the 2003 race.

## **Paddling**

It is expected that we will have approx 4 different paddling stages and these will encompass ocean, river and lake paddling. We have had the opportunity to explore just a small portion of the river paddling available on the course but look forward to exploring some more stages during this next month. Most of the paddling will be in relatively sheltered waters but the tidal patterns, the great Southern ocean swells, and the wind can affect every paddling stage.

## **Mountain Biking**

Away from the coast the mountain biking reconnaissance took our checkout team deep into the forestry regions that surround the city. We spent many hours poring over the maps choosing routes through the Radiata pine forests. Much time was spent backtracking, not that we were lost, but simply checking and finding the best routes for the race to take. At night or in low cloud (even during the day) the navigation on these stages will be critical.

## **Trekking**

As we left the coastal region and moved inland I began to think that the first mountain section was almost too easy - but then the sting in the tail. Native NZ bush, slippery steep fern covered hill sides and narrow rocky gorges and after a couple of hours of this - I had changed my mind completely. This was definitely a section worthy of inclusion in any Southern Traverse.

## **Next Month**

Future course check outs will see the Southern Traverse team exploring the vast regions of high schist outcrops and tussock upland plains of inland Otago. These areas were first visited by the early gold miners who explored this area, and the remnants of their visits, the water races, dams and crude roads will provide pathways and vital clues to the navigation in this vast area.