

2006 New Zealand

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2006 – 12th Annual World Sprints in Lake Karapiro, New Zealand

- Bronze in Golden Master's V1 500m – John Roberts, Calgary.
- Bronze in the 500m V12 Golden Master Men combo Canada/New Zealand team

Waka Ama 2006 was paddling at its finest. Great competition, a good venue, and the special camaraderie that develops between paddlers in a race situation were highlights of the session. Added bonus: Canada doubled its medal score over the 2004 Hilo event. John Roberts repeated his win in the 500m V1, bringing home another bronze, and a Canada/New Zealand team of Golden Master Men won bronze in the 500m V12 event, bringing our medal total to 2.

Medals aside, there were a lot of personal bests during this event, and a Canadian record, set by Brian Webster in the V1-500 Open Men's event. Brian came home in 02:22.14, to set a new mark for local paddlers.

If you had to describe the Lake Karapiro event in one word, that word would have to be 'busy'. Canada's team was small – fewer than 35 paddlers, including two adaptive paddlers from the Sunshine Coast. Canada did not field an adaptive team this year, so Din and Sarah won their special medals with the Italian adaptive team, then switched jerseys and paddled with the Canadian team. Only the Golden Master paddlers were able to field full teams in their event. Open, Master and Senior Master events were all mixed age groups, with seniors finding themselves in some surprising combinations. The bottom line was, everyone raced, and if a group of senior paddlers found themselves in an open event, it was still a great experience.

The meet venue, Lake Karapiro, is half an hour south of Hamilton, on New Zealand's North Island. Getting to the venue from team accommodations meant driving in a shuttle – Brian Webster and Sheila Kuyper did yeoman service coping with driving on the 'other side' (we quickly learned not to call it the 'wrong' side) of the road. Sheila's performance throughout the meet was extraordinary. Aside from driving (and the disadvantage to a 9-passenger bus is that you have 8 back seat drivers) Sheila took on the responsibility of making up teams, to ensure the strongest possible teams for each event, and to provide opportunities for every participant to paddle. All this was in addition to her own races, and while she didn't medal, she was hot on the heels of the hardware winners. As a novice steerer, she did a superb job in guiding the V6s around the course.

Events were held on a 500m course, but the 1000m and 1500m events used only half the course, with a turn at the 250m mark, adding up to three turns in the 1000m races and five in the 1500m. From the spectators' point of view, it was a much more exciting race and in many cases technique on the turns almost cancelled out power on the straight-of-way.

Weatherwise, there was a bit of everything. The races started off on a clear, sunny day, with calm water. From there it evolved to foggy mornings that delayed the race starts, pouring rain that almost obscured the buoys at the end of the course and sent literal rivers of water churning through the team tents, to howling winds strong enough to raise 8-12" waves running diagonally across the course. Those winds also shifted one of the turn buoys and when course officials attempted to re-set the marker, several other buoys were also nudged out of place, resulting in closing down the races for the rest of the day to make course corrections. That left several hours worth of races to catch up on over the next two days, but race officials managed to do it. Efficient marshalling, fast starts, quick turnarounds and co-operative racers made it work.

The race course volunteers were wonderful. In between races they loaded and unloaded crews, bailed boats, and always had time for a cheery greeting. New Zealanders have to be among the world's most friendly people, and Kiwi volunteers were the pick of the crop.

With Waka Ama '06 behind us, it's time now to concentrate on the racing season ahead of us, and to begin planning for Canada's turn on the world stage, when we host the 2012 World Outrigger Sprints at Penticton.

~ Florida Town