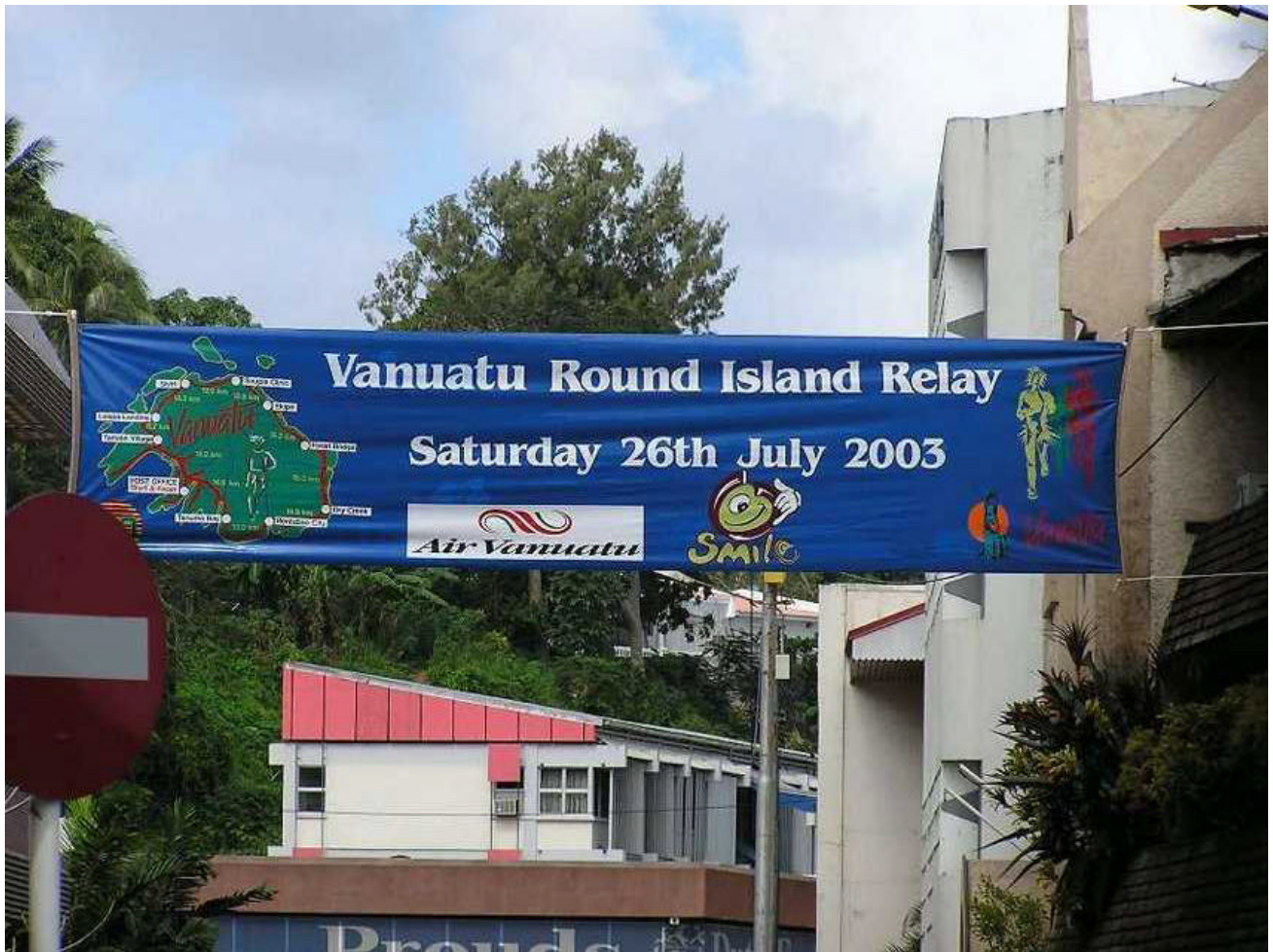


# Vanuatu Round Island Relay



**2003 Team Memories**



Port Villa – street scene

# Jump Start Competitive Team

Average age: 41.4 years

Runner	Section	Distance	Time
1 Heidi Dening	Port Vila Post Office – Tamata Village	13.0 km	71:56
2 Stephanie Matiske	Tamata Village – Lelepa Landing	11.6 km	71:11
3 Rachel Lazzara	Lelepa Landing – Siviri	14.1 km	73:44
4 Mandy Judd	Siviri – Saupia Clinic	12.7 km	83:39
5 Nicola Kent	Saupia Clinic – Bethel Resort	14.8 km	70:27
6 Jacki Cole	Bethel Resort – Forari Bridge	13.3 km	86:27
7 Ken Doolan	Forari Bridge – Dry Creek	16.0 km	84:13
8 Geoff Henderson	Dry Creek – Rentabao City	14.9 km	83:43
9 Maggie Hart	Rentabao City – Teouma Bay	13 km	82:12
10 Megan Latham	Teoma Bay – Port Vila	16.1 km	98:29



## Section 1 – Heidi Dening

It was the section I said I would never do – no matter what!!! But, it ended up being a necessity, so there I was at the start line, looking down that pitch-black road, wondering how long I would enjoy this section, before that god-damn terrifying ‘mountain’ loomed in front of me.

The horn sounded, and Ed and I trotted down the road, arm in arm, knowing that we were setting the scene for our team mates, who were shouting at the tops of their voices, “Go Heidi”, “Go Ed”. There weren’t many teams that started at 5am this year, so I was able to enjoy the lead for about the first 25mins, until the 2 French guys decided that they were not going to have a woman in front of them!

Running before dawn is an incredible experience – especially in Vanuatu. The freshness of the morning, the smell of fires burning, the cock roosters cock-a-doodle doo-ing, the birds waking, and the ni-Vanuatu smiles still shining bright even in the darkness.

That first 10km felt absolutely fantastic. I felt like I was running like the wind – I was on fire – my rhythm was perfect, my strides were long, and I was easily breathing. Then came that monster!!!! I had figured there was going to be about 1500 steps to the top. Well I did 900 tiny weeny-peeny jogging steps, but then needed to resort to walking for 200, because it just got sooooo steep that my walk steps were bigger than my jogs! Oh the pain, my legs burned more than they had ever before, and I could not get my mouth open wide enough to get enough air. I must have looked a real sight! After the 1600<sup>th</sup> step, it flattened out, and I knew that I had accomplished something that not many people do.

I felt proud of myself, and the adrenalin started flowing through my tired limbs – I bounced to the finish line. What a superb feeling.



## Leg 2 - Stephanie Matiske

When Heidi took a busload of us around the island to look at our section for the relay it was an eye opener. Section 2 was to belong to Sue and Pat. Although the shortest at 11.6 km, there were also a lot of hills. I felt sorry for Sue who was to be in the fun team with me and was hoping she wouldn't suggest that we swap sections!

The following day Sue and I were returning from a shopping trip to buy our supplies for race day when Heidi called us over to the pool. She suggested I sit down as she had something to ask me. A message from home!?? No- Pat in the race team had not been well and didn't feel up to running - would I consider it? Being my first time at this let alone not having been a runner until earlier this year I was daunted by the prospect and those hills - oh well!!!

So I had section 2 after all. At least it was early in the day and I was thankful for that as it became very hot later. After a stretch I headed off feeling slightly terrified. Ken was stretching the previous runner so I had a lot of the start on my own which was peaceful at that time of day. A few villagers had come out from their nearby houses and smiled and waved which seemed to give me some more energy. I planned to run up as much of each hill as possible and then walk when necessary.

I found the toughest part the flat section in the second half. I'd already tired myself out on the hills and this part seemed to go on forever with no change in direction or scenery. The bus would pass every so

often and Nicola and Jacki ran some of this with me which helped.

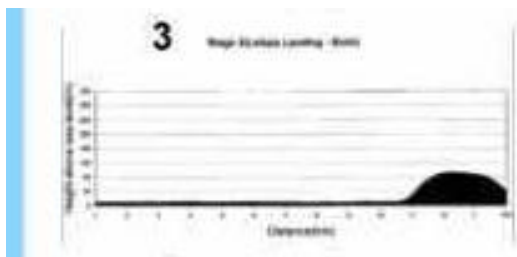
Finally the flat turned into a huge run downhill with a beautiful ocean view. I could see one of the locals in the distance who called out "only half a km to go and all downhill" which was a relief so I decided to go for it and make up some lost time.

There was a large group waiting at the changeover and it was exhilarating to finally make it to the marker and have a welcome stretch on the nearby beach.

Now I could enjoy the rest of the day - It was done.



### Section 3 – Rachele Lazarra



### Section 4 - Mandy Judd

I was really excited about running this section because it was in the daylight, last year I had the honour of running the last leg, which I started around 7:30pm..... anyhow, that was last year.

So this year I started at around 8:30am and I was really surprised at how hot it got, and how quickly.

I must admit I was pretty lucky as I ran through 3 of the prettiest villages of the whole island.

There were bands playing for me, escort runners running with me and water tunnels to cool me down.

The best part was the children lining these tunnels who clapped and cheered as I ran through.

Thanks Heidi for all of your hill training as apparently I didn't realise I was half way up a hill when I asked Ken if we had started the hill yet.

Thanks to all the participants who made the trip fabulous – I am looking forward to next year.



### Leg 5 – Nicola Kent

Totally and utterly \*BUZZED\* would be the best way to describe how I was feeling at the start line of my section. The excitement, energy and adrenalin had been building since 3.45 wake-up time that morning and if I hadn't been 'let

loose' on the road soon, I think my sneakers would have taken off without me!

Why buzzed? For a whole lot of reasons. First and foremost was the fact that I'd been watching my team members put in such a fantastic effort on each of their legs (pardon the pun) thus far. Despite the hills and long distances, there was an amazing show of determination and conviction to 'make it to the end' which is exactly what everyone did, and did well!

Then there were the local (ni-Vanuatu) runners - many of them perfect examples of speed and agility and debunking the idea that one needs good shoes to run fast...most of them had no shoes at all on the rocky surface and were doing 3-4min kms!

Included in the local teams was one made up of young, wide-eyed ni-Vanuatu school children who had been brought to Efate from a small outer island to compete. It was the first time they had left their island. A couple of American Peace Corp teachers had raised the funds, trained the team on a single grassy area in front of their school (no roads on the island) and were then supporting them on this race day, as well as running the relay themselves doing 68km each. Inspirational!

Also inspirational was a member of the French military (OH LA LA!! to the whole team who were a delight to watch) who ran THE WHOLE 138KM by himself!

So these factors, along with the fact that we were doing something just so different to the norm, in an amazing environment and under such unique circumstances, all contributed to the BUZZED feeling.

So back to my section....Well, I have to admit, it was harder than I thought it would be. I had been deluded in the previous day's bus trip of this section, thinking it was pretty much flat. In fact, it was a very gradual incline nearly all the way. When this was combined with the heat of the day, no shady reprieves, a dry rocky road surface and two local male competitors in front of me that I was 'encouraged' by my team-mates to overtake (it took an effort to do so), it made for a tough run. However, with the

smiling faces of the ni-Vanuatu along the way, the support of my team members and a cool shady grassy area at the finish line on which to collapse, the toughness was more than bearable. It was definitely worth it.

In no time at all I was feeling the post-run endorphins high and, after a hit of glucose and a stretch by Ken, my sneakers wanted to hit the road again. With the pressure off, some stunning scenery, more friendly locals and inspired by more amazing efforts by team-mates, the afternoon/early evening went blissfully by.

Thanks Heidi, thanks Ken, thanks team and thanks Vanuatu (Tanku Tu Mas).

This Round Island Relay was an experience of a lifetime.



## Leg 6 – Jacki Cole

### 13.3kms which felt like 33.3kms...

After the early morning start (I literally jumped out of bed, I was so excited) and the absolute thrill and exhilaration of cheering on our team mates, Arthur (the mad Frenchman who ran the entire 140kms himself! But BOY what a body!),

the VERY cute French Military boys and the absolutely awe-inspiring, bare-footed local competitors, when it was my turn to take over possession of the relay tag from Nic (who had POWERED through her 14.8km leg!) I was coiled as tight as a spring.

I took off from the changeover point and just up the road was the first corner – as soon as I was around it, I left the excitement and noise of the village behind and found myself running along an absolutely beautiful part of God's earth, with the sea on my left and a totally unspoilt tropical island on my right.

I felt really good for the first few kms but all of a sudden (I have no idea how far I had run) I felt like a wall came up and hit me in the face. It was the heat, I'm sure of it. I needed water – BAD. A competitor team drove past me and stopped – they fed me water and encouraged me to keep it up. And just a matter of minutes later, WAHOO!!!!!! HERE COMES THE BUS!! As you're running along, you can hear them coming from at least 200 metres away – TOOT TOOT! TOOT TOOT! "GO JACK", "YOU'RE LOOKING GREAT JACK" (I didn't feel that great...), "YOU'RE FLYING ALONG JACK", "YOU'VE LEFT THAT GUY BEHIND YOU FOR DUST".

Oh what a great team – Ken, Maggie, Ed, Megan, Nic, Mandy, Steph and Geoff (the ones on the bus when I ran) were just THE BEST! Without them, it just wouldn't have been the same.

And THE LOCALS!!! The support from the villagers is inspiring – those smiles, waves and mighty HELLOOOOOs. I was running at one point through what appeared to be a fairly deserted area and suddenly from high up in a tree about 5 metres off the road came a chorus of "HELLOOOO" – 3 kids perched up in a tree waving at me. I picked up my pace a little ☺

The heat really got me – I thought I was pretty fit before I left for Vanuatu, but for the last 5 kms of my run, I really felt like my legs just weren't moving. My saving grace was Nic (I love that girl!) and Ed (? dum de dum dum dum? ) sticking by my side for at least a couple of kms – just listening to them chatting was a pleasure.

"How far to go?", I asked Joseph, our driver. "It's just around the corner", he replied. "Hmmm... which corner would that be exactly?????"

Finally, there's Ken at the changeover – I gave it my all for the last 100 metres and gave him a very sweaty hug and kiss as I handed him the tag – GO KEN! You're a blo\*dy legend!



### Leg 7 - Ken Doolan

I was thinking "here I am standing in the middle of a tropical island ready to run (I thought) this bloody leg again. Third year in a row (God, Irish men are stupid). I was waiting to see Jacki's happy smile any moment now to pass me the dreaded ribbon which meant the start of my leg.

I heard the locals start to cheer and clap and know that Jacki is close. The butterflies start. Here she is smiling away knowing she is finished.

I am off. This is where the mind games start (yes I do have a brain, Heidi my love). Plodding along up the hill. God it's hot. Not much further up the hill, I keep telling myself. I wish I had someone to talk to (as you all know I do like to talk!).

At last here is the bus just in time - water. The gang on the bus are fantastic shouting encouragement cheering taking photos - what a great bunch of people.

Nicola (the whippet) shouts out "want me to run with you". "Yes" I shout back (great someone to talk to).

1hr 24 mins later I finish (just barely) promising myself to train harder for next

year. I can't thank the gang on the bus enough for their support - ED, MAGGIE, STEPH, JACKIE, J.J, GEOFF, MANDY AND THE WHIPPET...THANK YOU ALL YOU WERE FANTASTIC (and for putting up with me)

ps. Nicola thanks for running with me and putting up with my talking you were a saviour.



### Leg 8 - Geoff Henderson

I particularly remember the dirt road which was corrugated and dusty with potholes everywhere to ensure you kept your head down. Then there were the endless kilometres which eventually turned into the last kilometre which finally met a hill for the finish home.

The scenery - if I did get a chance to lift my head, either my perspiration or the sun prevented me from having a look around - I think was green. But there was a highlight - I passed the Frenchman [who did the run alone] who happened to be walking at the time and he didn't catch me. I do remember the lone natives who gave me encouragement together with my team mates who were so supportive.

The shower and beers at the end of the day were the highlight of the run. Did I enjoy it? Of course I did!



### Leg 9 - Maggie Hart

Apart from getting over the fact that I was spending all this money on a holiday, when my other daughter planned on marrying soon, I also had to focus on this relay. So, after much training in Sydney with Heidi, I considered myself all primed and ready for the big event - never in a million years did I think I would have such a buzz on the day. Ed was equally chuffed and a great help in supporting all us girls.

The boys were privileged to have to go through numerous toilet stops for the girls all drank far too much water! Special thanks to Nikki who helped me through a tough patch on my run, (I was sick), but I did manage to finish.

My personal experience was one of great team spirit, and feeling humble and proud as I was running through the small villages, as they all came out and clapped and played music.

One can only say that the ni-Vanuatu run like the wind, sometimes without any shoes! I had a young girl run past me, and the army, who were really supportive in yelling me on, as I don't think many local girls run, especially gals over 50! I really enjoyed getting to know everyone so well on our bus, and I will never forget the experience.



## Leg 10 - Megan Latham

After a whole day of sitting in a mini-van, yelling myself hoarse encouraging other runners and team mates, when the changeover from Geoff (who'd put in an incredibly gritty effort – I'm SO pleased I finally talked he and Pat into coming!) finally came, I was ready to take off and just enjoy the next hour and a bit of my life.

This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> time around for me joining Ken and Heidi and the Jumpstart teams in coming to Vanuatu and participating in this incredible event. And Heidi had given me the pleasure and privilege of running the final leg. It was only a day or so before the race that I was informed that my leg had been extended beyond the usual Post Office finish line, out past the Tusker factory – this was going to be a longer race than I had ever completed previously.

The team were with me from about 20 minutes into the run. The water I guzzled was much needed. I felt good and I was in stride. The daytime started to turn to dusk. It was still hot. I changed from sunglasses to normal glasses. Ken ran with me. I had water poured over my back – that felt great.

I finally arrived in the outskirts of Port Vila. The traffic got heavier, the pedestrians more common. It was dark now. The van drove carefully right behind me, with the lights of the van lighting my way and keeping me safe.

For the last few kilometres, Ken and later Nicola ran with me. We weren't running slowly.

Suddenly a Police car appeared in front of me and for the final kilometre or so, I was escorted into the finishing area with lights blazing and siren blaring. And then, there they all were – Heidi, Bron, Pat and the rest of the Jumpstart team – waving, cheering and yelling me on, welcoming me and the run team home.

It was a long day. It was an exhilarating day. It was a day never to forget. The next question is: will I return a 4<sup>th</sup> time??? Ni-Vanuatu, Tanku tumas.





Run team members with driver and scrutineer



Race day over – now it's party time!



Sunset at Chantilly's

