



BACK TO BASICS: HEAD TORCHES AND BARE BUMS IN THE HOMER TUNNEL.  
ARTWORK: LAURA WILLIAMSON

# The tortoise and the hare

Sprinting starkers for charity in the shadow of the Darran Mountains.

WILLIAM BLAKE ONCE WROTE THAT ART CAN NEVER EXIST WITHOUT NAKED BEAUTY DISPLAYED. IN FIORLAND, THEY'RE ON THE SAME PAGE, AND THERE'S PERHAPS NO GREATER EVIDENCE OF THIS THAN THE SIGHT OF A CROWD OF LOCALS DASHING NAKED THROUGH A DARK, COLD TUNNEL EVERY APRIL FOOL'S DAY. THE HOMER TUNNEL, TO BE EXACT, A MIGHTY CANVAS FOR THE ART TO EXIST ON.

At about 10:30pm on April 1st, one hundred odd brave souls run 1.2 kilometres east to west through the ominous gateway to Milford, bare as the day they were born – running shoes and head torch aside, of course. Some do it for sporting glory, most do it for shits and giggles, and everyone's doing it for charity. It's at 10:30 at night because, well, trucks and sandflies.

The Great Annual Nudie Run, as it's known to locals, is coming up 19 years, which is no small thing considering the beast that is the Homer Tunnel. The tunnel, which slices through the solid rock of the Darran Mountains, is an ode to human engineering. It was built mostly by government relief workers during the Great Depression, and, after slight delays due to World War II and a large avalanche, was opened in 1963. Impressive, yes, but also a bit terrifying. Evocative of a giant drain, it doesn't initially scream "get naked".

But the human imagination knows no bounds and, in the seventies, the first vanload of Hash Harriers (a social running club) did the dash in the buff. There was a long hiatus, then in the late nineties, a crowd from the Redcliff restaurant in

Te Anau held a one-off event, including trophies for the winner. Another hiatus, and then Rosco Gaudin, the self-appointed 'Mayor of Milford', picked up the baton in 2003. He set up Ken and Barbie trophies (naked, of course) and locked in the date for April 1st, every year.

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Rosco, who runs Milford-based Rosco's Kayaks, is the six-time winner of the infamous Homer to Home downhill cycle race, discontinued in 2004 due to safety concerns. The 'Mayor of Milford' title, he explains, is mostly tongue-in-cheek. "I've appointed myself and no-one's kicked me out of office since 1998." Self-appointed or not, he's influential, and manages to get the tunnel flashing with about a hundred head torches and bare bums every year. And while it may seem a stretch to take oneself seriously when scurrying through a tunnel without a stitch on, Rosco reckons about 20% of participants are competing in earnest. They are here to win.

Mostly, though, it's a bit of a laugh, much like Rosco's mayor thing. "Kayak guides – well, my kayak guides – have been renowned for getting nude a bit over the years. It's fun in the sun." It is, of course, not sunny at all, but everyone seems to have a great time. According to one anonymous Milford local, the run is, "invigorating, natural and beautiful, non-perverse, a great way to make

new friends, and something we should all do more often."

The crowd is mostly Milford residents, and Rosco says that as much as anything, the event gives the people who come from all around the world to work there an experience. It also raises good money for charities, with last year's proceeds going to Marine Search and Rescue. Rosco himself had to give up the nudity for admin years ago, and on the night can be found decked out in high vis, top to bottom. "If traffic did come along, they'd be really confused just seeing a sea of naked people," Rosco explains. "There's got to be someone who looks like they're in charge."

Rosco has tried to keep things mostly under the radar, which was the idea behind having it on April Fool's Day. "It's breaking just about every rule on a state highway, nude running at night. We do it under our own steam, with our own rules." Rosco does run a tight ship. For those who require a spot of liquid courage, sober drivers are available, but if you're staggering, you can't run, and there's no glass allowed in the tunnel.

The 19th Great Annual Nudie Run is scheduled for 2022, then look out. Rosco's got big plans for the big 2-0, hoping to get some celebrities down to give it a crack. That gives you, dear reader, a warm up before the big one, and a few months to train. Not in your birthday suit, of course, that may get you locked up. But, with the shorter days and the sandflies still in retreat to wherever the hell they come from, now is the time to get in shape and get ready to de-robe. Head for Milford, bring your dressing gown and look for the guy in high-vis.

GEORGIA MERTON