

Title: *Nathan Fa'avae*

Subtitle: *Adventurer At Heart*

Author: Nathan Fa'avae

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Website: www.pottonandburton.co.nz

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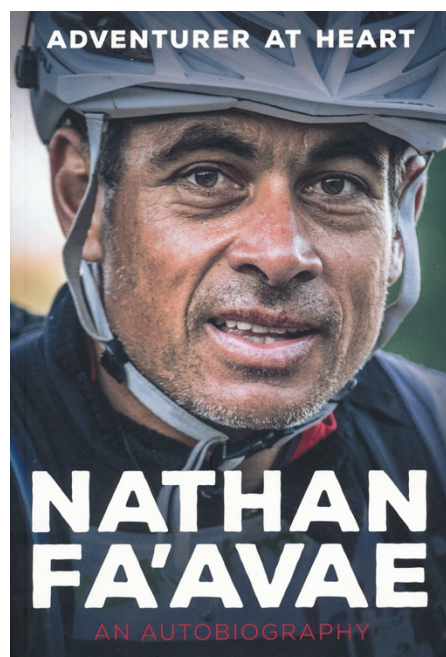
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Availability: NZ bookshops

Review: Paul Caffyn



When the review copy turned up with the rural postie, I had a quick flick through the pages, a slower look at the colour pics, then put the book aside. After all, it was a book about competitive adventure racing and although I take a passing interest in the races, I have no interest in competing in the outdoors. I feel that any form of competitive sea kayaking not only adds an additional level of danger but also it takes away the sheer pleasure of being out on the water, taking time to enjoy the scenery and savour the sensory escape from all the trappings of everyday life.

One evening I picked up the book for a skim read, but was quickly drawn in to Nathan's life story by the rather absorbing and entertaining writing style. Born in Nelson to a Samoan father and a Kiwi mother in 1972, Nathan had a pretty cruisy childhood but started to go off the rails as a teenager, with shoplifting, smoking, drinking and relocating cars that had keys left in the ignition. Experience at Nelson college's outdoor lodge and later at the Whenua Iti Outdoor Pursuits Centre marked a start to turning his life around, and he found he had better than average endurance for hill running and mountain biking.

Short of paddling experience and a kayak for his first Coast to Coast multisport race, he and two mates cycled to Grahame Sisson's Nelson factory where Nathan put a lean on Grahame to borrow a mould so he could make a race kayak. Met with a 'tirade of abuse', Nathan and his mate paid \$10 for day hire kayaks from the Nelson Canoe Club, but with the knowledge of where the locked container keys were stashed, they went paddle training three times a week for three months before being found out. He managed to borrow one of Grahame's kayaks for that first race. Grahame went on to sponsor Nathan with kayaks and even support crewed for him.

In many ways, that marked the start of Nathan's lifelong passion for adventure racing. Jobs at Outward Bound for Nathan and his partner Jodie, allowed a blend of work and racing. By 1999 he was into team multiday races, but problems with a dicky ticker began (atrial fibrillation). Operations and intensive training allowed him to overcome the occasional slowing down issue.

Chapters follow with adventure races in New Zealand and around the world, touching on the highlights and hard times of racing; the training and preparation involved and the vital need for similarly motivated team members. With so much experience behind him, Nathan formed a successful company to run outdoor races, including very popular women only events.

Nathan considered the 'Holy Grail' of New Zealand sea kayaking was Stewart Island. He and paddling mate Tony Bateup began an anti-clockwise circuit in March 2010, a time of generally settled weather. They surfed the entire northern coast in one afternoon, with a

tailwind of 20 knots with a following 2 – 3 metre swell and had a smooth run down the west coast to near the Muttonbird Islands, where a storm hit rather earlier than expected. In gale-force winds, they finally reached the shelter of Easy Harbour, which became their home for the following week. When the savage weather abated, at least the wind had died, Nathan and Tony ‘gunned for South Cape’ anticipating that once around the headland, they were pretty much home and hosed. They hadn’t anticipated that the strong tidal stream and a weather tide created ‘the highest, steepest seas’ that Nathan had ever paddled in. At times it felt like, ‘kayaking down the side of a two-storey building’. This was the first of several attempts to round South Cape, but eventually with no sign of sea conditions easing, they took up an offer of a ride on a crayboat back to Bluff – not before vowing to return some day.

It staggers me how much Nathan has crammed into his 43 years, the adventure racing, the sheer amount of vital training almost every day, raising a family, dealing with the recurring issue of his dicky ticker, mentoring and encouraging younger competitors, raising sponsorship and public speaking. And only two weeks ago, he and his team won the 2015 AR World Championship race in Brazil.

My only gripe with the book is with the publisher. The colour plates lose much of their impact by being surrounded by a sea of white, and not bled out to the page edge.

Ed Hillary reckoned that he had modest ability but better than average motivation. In my view, Nathan has not only better than average motivation but he is also superbly skilled outdoor athlete. And Nathan has a better than average way with stringing words together to form an excellent yarn.