

## Dutch Marco Polo Cycling Club team participated in the Tour of the Himalayas, Pakistan

Friday, 30 September 2011

A Dutch Marco Polo Cycling Club team participated in the Tour of the Himalayas, a 3 day mountainbike event in Pakistan. The tour was organised by the Kaghan Memorial Trust as fundraising event for the school that was build in the area that was hit so hard by the 2005 earthquake [www.kmt.org.pk](http://www.kmt.org.pk) The Dutch team consisted of the women Ranhilde Luttenberg and Kim van de Belt, both student champions in the Netherlands and men down-hill biker Miel Barkmeyer, one of Dutch top-bikers Irjan Luttenberg and Marco Polo Cycling co-founder and team manager Remko Kramer. They competed with bikers from 12 nations in the beautiful Kaghan Valley at the outskirts of the Himalaya.

Marco Polo Cycling founders Remko Kramer and Nathan Dahlberg at the Tour of the Himalayas 2011 in Pakistan. (photo: Adam Glendinning)

After the 2005 earthquake the idea of organising a bike race came back from the memories of the 1999 Islamabad-Lahore race, organised as a cooperation between Pakistan and the founders of Marco Polo Cycling including New Zealander Nathan Dahlberg. Nathan is still involved in the event organisation and takes care of the sportive part and choice of the racing routes. He made an interesting mix of more then challenging courses in the high altitudes along the Kaghan Valley.

Organiser Khurram Khan with the Dutch team at the Tour of the Himalayas 2011. (photo: Tatjana)

The race started with the Babusar Challenge, a race up in the north of Kaghan Valley and up the Babusar Pass, which reaches an altitude of 4200 meters (14,000 feet). This stage was a clear victory for Slovakian Martin Haring. And the two Mongolian riders, pupils of former Marco Polo Cycling Team rider Jamsran Ulzii-Orshikh were also showing their good form. Dutch Irjan Luttenberg took the 3rd place in this physical test of endurance through the litterally breathtaking beautiful valley with awesome views on the surrounding snow covered mountain tops. There was bad luck for the Dutch team, Remko Kramer crashed in the fast decent of Babusar could still make it to the finish, but couldn't start the second stage and Irjan Luttenberg had bad stomach problems which took him also out of the race into the second stage.

This second stage was a technical course around the Lake Saif-ul Maluk, a lake at 3200 meters altitude with stunning views on snow-capped mountains of over 5000 meters surrounding it. This was another victory for Martin Haring and the British team took over the lead in the team classification.

The third stage took the riders up to Pai Meadows starting from the school. At this Sunday several school children still came out to the school to watch the start. In this 16 kilometer stage there was 14 kilometers of climbing with 1600 altitude meters which make this a grueling climb. The second half of the climb the steepest on a difficult rocky jeep trail. The race started in the warm and sunny valley but at the finish a hard hail storm made it a tough time for the riders. Especially riders that came in later had to struggle for almost 1 hour in the ice cold hail storm through a deep layer of ice. This stage was another victory for Martin Haring taking the overall victory. It was Nathan Dahlberg who finished each stage in a good position, who took the 2nd place.

The Tour of the Himalayas was a succesful event with participants from all around the world. It showed the unique beauty of the Kaghan Valley and it's touristic opportunities. And it brought in funds and attention for the Kaghan Memorial school, a great good cause! Meanwhile almost 300 children get first-class education now, which they otherwise never would get. This is a great project with long term future effects for these children, their families and this area.

Fantastic work of the [www.kmt.org.pk](http://www.kmt.org.pk) organisation. Donations are welcome!

School kids at the Kaghan Memorial school. (photo: Remko Kramer)