

Noel won't grumble after his rumble in the jungle

TWELVE days in the jungle with bats, leeches and crocodiles for company would be more than enough for most people but Dromara's Noel Hanna is already getting ready to do it all again next year.

Noel (33) has recently returned from the Eco Challenge World Championships held in Borneo, Malaysia in which his Ireland team finished 27th out of 79 teams.

The team was made up of Noel, Ian Cummings from Warrenpoint, Allison Maurice from Saintfield and Killarney man Timmy Flaven and they all had to endure 300 miles of some of the most inhospitable terrain in the world.

"I enjoyed it, it was a great buzz and I love the experience of having to really push yourself to the limit," said the civil servant.

It wasn't all plain sailing for the team and Noel and the two other men had to spend time in hospital when they arrived back home after the race.

They got off lightly compared to other com-

petitors though. "I was in the Royal Victoria for a week after the race but to be honest I wasn't that bad - if I had come back from an ordinary holiday in the same condition I don't think they would have kept me in that long," said Noel.

DISEASE

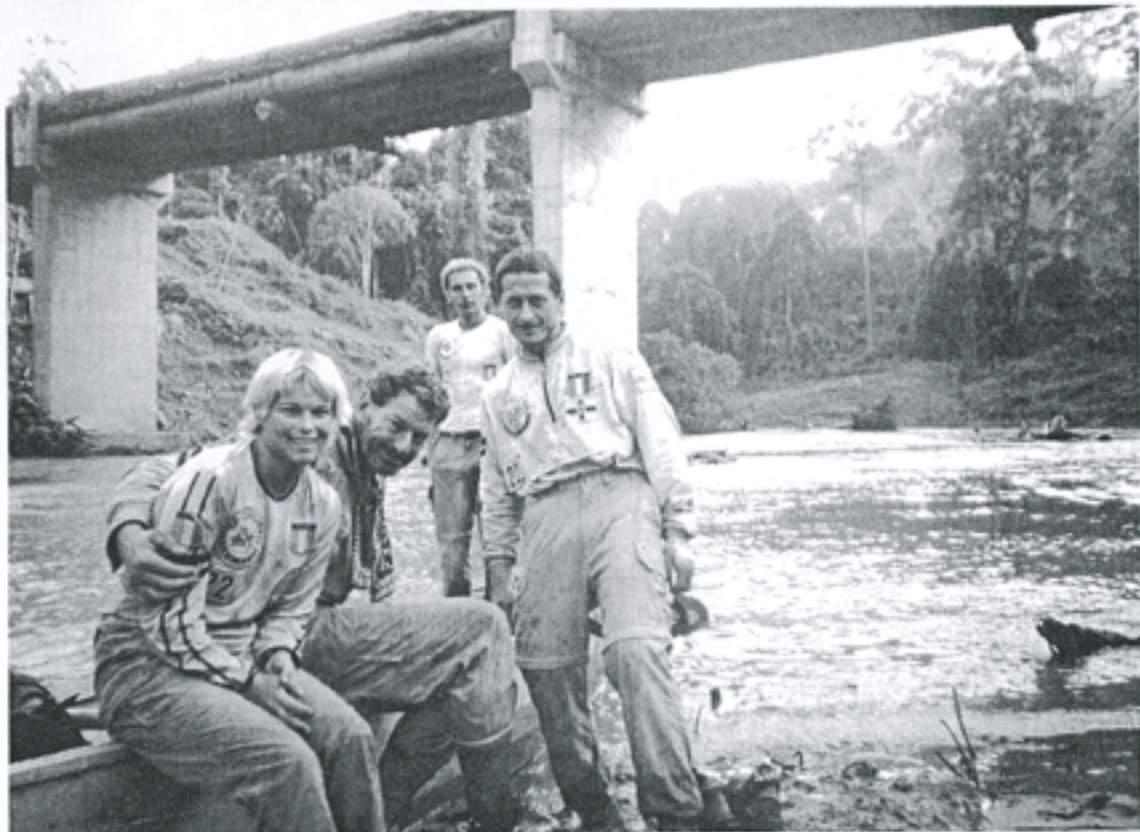
A team of English adventurers who returned from the race are still recovering from Weil's disease which they contracted after swimming in a jungle river.

It is believed that between 60 and 70 out of 220 competitors from around the world may be suffering from leptospirosis which is spread by rats urine and which can cause severe damage to liver, kidneys and lungs.

Tests carried out at the Royal Victoria Hospital have given Noel the all-clear from leptospirosis.

"Insects buried into our feet and legs and they think that these are what may have made us so sick - I have taken a course of tablets to get rid of them," said Noel.

"The only team member who wasn't admitted to hospital, Allison Maurice, cut her foot quite



The Mighty Jungle. Pictured in Borneo during the race are Allison Maurice, Ian Cummings, Timmy Flaven and Noel Hanna who made up the Ireland North/South team. 41960

badly during the race and had to take anti-biotics so maybe that saved her from catching anything else."

DANGEROUS

The disciplines involved in the race included jungle trekking, canoeing, river paddling, caving, sailing, mountain biking, abseiling and diving.

"The mountain biking was really tough for us because we had to cope with temperatures of 42 degrees, I have competed in hotter places but the rest of the time found it really tough and became dehydrated.

"We had to abseil down at cliff at one stage at 3am in pitch-black dark which was potentially very dangerous.

"During the caving section we had to get through a course with bat droppings up to our knees, in the canoeing section we could see big crocodiles in the water and on the banks of the river and we were plagued with leeches trying to

attach themselves to us."

Apart from the wildlife the Ireland team also had to cope with the very difficult climate in Borneo.

"The jungle was really slippery, every evening it would rain for five or six hours which made the going really tough because we had to carry five days food plus all our gear which is a lot of weight and bulk."

PLANS

But despite experiences that would put most of us off adventure racing for life Noel is still keen to compete again.

"At the moment I am planning a team for next year's race which may be in South Africa - I want to put together a really competitive team that will give 100 per cent and aim for a top ten finish."