



## **Lucy Bartholomew set to ignite Ring of Fire**

Former two-time world champion Lucy Bartholomew will be the star attraction among the elite athletes set to compete at the 2019 Ring of Fire International Ultra on Saturday (March 23).

The 22-year-old Australian sensation – who has been preparing for the event for the past three weeks in New Zealand – will be seeking a strong outing in the 72km solo race, which circumnavigates Mt Ruapehu.

The 2014 Junior World Skyrunning champion and 2015 World Junior Ultra-Trial gold medallist – is already a fully-fledged “rock star” of the sport with a huge social media following.

Last year she claimed a brilliant third place finish in the Western States 100 – regarded as ultra-running’s most iconic event – and is preparing for another crack at the event in California’s Sierra Nevada mountains in June.

However, before then the woman from Diamond Creek in Victoria is looking forward to a strong showing at the Ring of Fire – already established as one of the most challenging and exhilarating alpine adventure running events on the global calendar.

“The other race I associate with the North Island is the Tarawera Ultramarathon, so it is very exciting to be able to run some amazing trails in a different part of New Zealand,” explains Lucy.

“I’ve heard so many good things about last year’s inaugural Ring of Fire event, that I was keen to experience it for myself.”

The most high profile of the men’s entrants for the gruelling 72km solo event is three-time former Coast to Coast winner Sam Clark, who will be sure to mount a major challenge.

Based in Tauranga, the top-class all-round multisport star has more recently switched his focus on ultrarunning and revealed his credentials by placing a strong second in the 50km race at the Tarawera Ultramarathon last month.

The 28-year-old Clark boasts an outstanding endurance pedigree and he is relishing the prospect of making his Ring of Fire debut.

“I really enjoying heading up to National Park - it is a stunning place to run,” explains Sam. “I’ve run around the Ring of Fire course before

and I love how the landscape changes from rocky and mountainous, through forest out to a moonscape and through the Tussock Traverse to end. It will be quite majestic.

“I’ve prepared well for the race, and I think the technical terrain will play in my favour but I know I’m still finding my feet with ultramarathon running and it is always hard to make too many predications.”

Other key contenders for the 72km solo race including the improving James Clendon.

The Aucklander placed third in the 50km solo race at the 2018 Ring of Fire and after a solid outing at the Tussock Traverse in January – which comprises leg three of ROF – he will fancy his chances of a prominent showing in the long course event.

Also returning for a crack at the 72km solo is Tauranga’s former New Zealand Mountain Running representative Chris Morrissey.

The experienced masters athlete finished fifth over the full distance at the 2018 Ring of Fire and after an encouraging sixth place finish in The Goat – which makes up leg one of ROF – in December he has the know how to mount a strong challenge.

Hamilton-based Helene Barron is another podium contender in the women’s 72km solo event.

Last year she dominated the women’s 50km event at ROF to take top honours and after a strong showing in Westport to grab third in last month’s the Old Ghost Ultra, she will be expected to feature.

The lead athlete in the 50km solo event is rising ultra-running force Kunaal Rajpal.

The Tauranga radiologist claimed a top ten finish in the 102km event at the 2018 Tarawera Ultramarathon before putting together an eye-catching display to finish third - after leading for much of the way - in the 85km Old Ghost Ultra.

The former road runner, who more recently has focused on ultra-running, is expected to start a strong favourite in the race which comprises legs two and three of ROF.

The Teams Relays have also attracted some top-class elite performers led by Sjors Corporaal – who features for the three-strong ??? team. The seven-time former winner of the The Goat has an unmatched knowledge of the technical first leg and the 41-year-old dairy farmer from Galatea is sure to give his team a flying start.

The 2019 event has attracted just under 700 entries – a record-breaking figure – and includes 102 internationals nearly three times up on last year.

Among other interesting entries include New Plymouth-based Craig Barrett, the former Commonwealth Games 50km race walk silver medallist, who has opted for the 72km solo event.

Barrett, who competed at three Olympic Games and who memorably collapsed in the final 1km when leading the 50km race walk at the 1998 Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Games, is a quality athlete and has the capability of producing a good result.

Also on the start line for the 72km solo event is former Olympic K1 1000m silver medallist Ben Fouhy. The Taupo-based former kayak star has more recently turned to endurance sport and earlier this month claimed a top 100 finish in Ironman NZ.

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