

All the Race reports so far have been from Teams who finished the Race, so I thought I might give an account from a Team who didn't, but still had a most excellent adventure.

Team ICCY was created from 4 members of Indooroopilly Canoe Club in Brisbane.

- Linton Burns – An experienced & successful Adventure Racer & Mountain Biker.
- Erin O'Keefe – Champion Marathon Kayaker.
- Robbie Edgar – Ex Champion Marathon Kayaker & Workhorse.
- Darren Wallis – 25m freestyle certificate 1971. Long time dabbler in endurance sports.

Linton & I roped in Erin – who was too inexperienced to say no, and then used peer group pressure on Robbie until he caved in.

We entered the race, booked a Campsite and then sat back & let 3 months go by while we all did our individual preparations. With 3 weeks to go we had our first real meeting & the emails started flying back & forth. We secured the services of Paul Gardner as Team Manager & Erin's brother Josh as support crew. We managed to find 2 double racing ski's that roughly matched our leg lengths, acquired the rest of the mandatory gear & were pretty much organised.

Going into the Race, our 2 major concerns were:

1. The cold/flu that Robbie had picked up in the last week on top of the one he had already had for about 3 months.
2. Erin's limited training / experience on the MTB combined with the \$400.00 bike she borrowed from her sister weighing in at about 20kgs or more.

Robbie assured us he was getting better, and we did some work on Erin's bike including removing the reflectors, handlebar streamers, basket with flower on front & swapping the wheels for some lightweight tubeless ones off Linton's Spare Bike.

We arrived at Stuarts Point about 3.30pm on the Thursday. We had time to comfortably set up our Campsite complete with a Fridge & a Microwave which Robbie had got from an appliance museum somewhere. Settled in, we headed off to the local Bowls Club for some Chinese & a glass or 2 of Red.

Friday proved to be a full on day starting with last minute gear preparations & bike servicing, registration, checking out the coffee van, compulsory gear & competency checks and catching up with friends & acquaintances. At 4.00pm we got our Maps, marked up some changes. Linton & I went back & started plotting the course & the others went to the pub / bowls club to get meals.

At 8.00pm we all assembled on the side of the river for the "Geo Twist" with Life Jackets & a Chocolate Bar as instructed. It was soon explained that if a team member was willing to swim in the freezing water to a Boat, their Chocolate Bar could be exchanged for a "get out of a checkpoint free card". Excellent! we thought, ditch the checkpoint on top of Mount Yarrapahinni !Erin took one look at the guys quickly changing into their Birthday Suits and volunteered before any of us could do the gentlemanly thing. The horn blew & Erin was off, Paul bolted for the bridge to check out a rumour that there was a naked female in the water. Erin returned safely with the Card, which we found out would not get us out of Mt Yarrapahinni, but was still a good acquisition anyway.

We did some more work on the Maps, packed & checked some gear & went to sleep at about 10.30pm pretty satisfied with our course planning.

LEG 1: Paddle, Run, Tube, Kayak, Tube, End – not a lot of Nav & plenty of contact with support crews – so carrying minimum gear.

The Race Started next morning about 5 minutes drive away on the beachfront at Grassy Head for a 12km paddle across the open ocean to South West Rocks – we expected to do fairly well here, being competent paddlers and paddling one of the faster craft on the water. The plan was to paddle at a comfortable pace and this seemed to work as we exited on the beach in 1:08, about 6 minutes down on the fastest and right with the Mountain Designs Team.

We had a reasonable transition (6mins) & headed out onto the spectacular trek through the National Park. Robbie was struggling up hill a bit due to the remnants of his flu, but once we reached the top it was a fantastic gradual decent to the beach. Then it was up again for a while off the beach & another gradual descent to a Lighthouse. We were doing very well and had beaten Mountain Design to this point who must have taken a slower cross country route. Running down the hill from the lighthouse we were passed by Mountain Designs, Crank & Mexican Stingers. After about 4 km or so we clipped of a checkpoint near a track junction just in time for Mountain Designs to pass us going backwards – must have got a bit carried away & missed it. As I jogged past the female team member I said “Smile” & she almost managed one.

We arrived at the 1<sup>st</sup> Tubing transition, changed back into our wetsuits and plunged into the icy creek. We did pretty well on this leg overtaking a number of Teams including Crank & Mexican Stingers, Erin’s tiny tire tube turning out to be a huge advantage with low water resistance. We climbed out of the creek for a quick portage of the tubes & into the River. A few of us got caught out here a bit by the fast moving water in the deep channel near the far bank.

A quick fully supported transition & onto the Skis again with the current & it felt like we were flying. All went pretty well until we went for the “easy” portage across the mud bank. 200m later & we were portaging our Skis over a rock wall. Erin damaged her shoulder here with some sort of rotation injury & we hoped it would not affect her training for the Kayak Marathon Worlds in August. By the time we cruised into transition I was wishing I hadn’t backed off on Kayak training so much & that there was a bit more leg length on the ski.

The next tubing section was a bit of a slog, wading through water carrying the tubes while Linton clipped of the Control points. Last checkpoint done we headed for the Beach for the run back to HQ.

Back at HQ we changed clothes, had a quick warm meal, re-organised & hopped back in the car for the transfer to:

LEG 2: Bike Rogaine, Foot Rogaine, Bike with hike a Bike (how hard could it be), Team Split Rogaine, Ride back to HQ.

We hopped out of the car at the start of leg 2 feeling pretty good warm, full of food and about 2hrs ahead of where we estimated. We had a fair chance of completing a good portion of the Rogaine(s) during daylight. This is where our troubles started. Linton looked at the support crew & said – did you guys put my backpack in? The look on their faces told us no. We quickly scratched around to see if we could summon up a compulsory kit for Linton, but unfortunately we came up a waterproof jacket short. We quickly dispensed Josh for the 50min round trip to HQ & hopped into the 2<sup>nd</sup> car to stay warm & dry as it was now raining pretty steadily.

After 30 minutes or so, anticipating Josh’s return we got out of the car & started to get ready. It was here whilst handing Robbie his pack that I discovered that he had packed nearly all of his worldly possessions. Straining, I handed it to Linton &

said "we have a problem". Linton grabbed the pack & started trimming the contents whilst Robbie started chasing him round the car insisting that he really did need 40 breakfast bars, 4kg's of Lollies & nuts, 10 litres of water, a bike chain & some Gumboots. Josh returned, Linton donned his pack & we were off on the Bikes.

Thinking that the Bike Rogaine would be one of our weaknesses, we had decided to do the bare minimum number of control points – even using the "get out of" card. In retrospect this was a big tactical error as we really weren't that bad & flew through the bike Rogaine hitting each checkpoint spot on – we should have done as many as possible on the bike as, unfortunately this now left us with 10 foot Rogaine control points, all except one of which was at a "creek junction",... sorry – there was also a "minor creek junction?" Should have said "Leech infested creek junction" – at one stage someone said look at your ankles – a quick inspection revealed about 10 very satisfied leeches on each ankle.

We wasted a bit of time getting to the 1<sup>st</sup> Control point due to a map scaling error (ours), and then proceeded to lose track of our position on the Map whilst trying to find a knoll to take a bearing to the next point. It took hours for us to recover from this and we were getting a bit frustrated. Somewhere during this the sky cleared, let all the heat out and the temperature dropped about 4 degrees. Erin was pretty wet & cold by now, she was shaking uncontrollably & we became worried she may be going hypothermic. We stopped & made her put on some extra dry clothes and started jogging for a while to warm her up. She recovered pretty well but I think the hours of cold wet clothes had sucked a lot of energy out of her. This was in direct contrast to Linton & I – hyped up on a few no-doz, I honestly felt like I could run forever, by the sound of it Linton had switched to Gas Power & was going strong. We finally got back to transition & started preparing for the next section. Linton decided this was a good time to start being a transition Nazi, but was told by Erin that she didn't give a Duck - strange thing to say, or maybe I didn't hear right.

We set off on the bikes. Glad to be departing the area at last, we were moving pretty well & catching a few teams along the way. Daylight had just broken as we arrived at the foot of Mt Yarrahapinni, the Sunlight warmed & seemed to energize us – just as well, we were going to need it. The course instructions had hinted this might be a bit difficult but it exceeded all of our expectations.

The "hike a bike" up the side of the Mountain started off hard & just got harder & harder. At one stage I looked up & was sure the grade was in excess of 45degrees. The tangle of vines & logs to negotiate made it even harder. We thought about the leading teams that would have blazed their own trail at night & realized we were getting it relatively easy. Erin was still depleted physically from last night & was not capable of carrying her bike up the Hill. Robbie was probably suffering more than he was letting on from the after effects of his flu. We knew Robbie was losing his patience when, in a tirade filled with expletives he grabbed his bike by the hair & skull dragged it up hill about 100m on a rampage, flung it to the ground & started vomiting. Linton & I took it in turns to leapfrog Erin's bike up the hill – taking it up about 50m, going back to get our bike – taking it up 100m and then back to get Erin's & so on. Sort of like going up, ½ way down & then back up again – almost a bit too much adventure for one morning.

Funny thing, when I got to the top of the Jungle, after about 10 seconds I felt good & managed to get the team off their butts & heading to the real top. We had the control point marked at the top of the Mountain, but a quick re-check of the coordinates showed it was actually at a lookout further down the other side. During the descent to the lookout we discovered Erin's bike had virtually no brakes – this was going to be a long descent. Linton swapped bikes with Erin for a

while until the Brakes completely wore out, and then Robbie took over and snaked down the hill doing power slides in the leaves on the side of the Road to slow down. As the grade reduced, Robbie was able to ride behind Erin holding onto her to slow her down. Linton & I would check the road a bit further down hill & yell out if there was an uphill section as a safety ramp, Erin would then come whizzing down the Hill while we hoped our judgement was right on the stopping power of the safety ramp.

About ½ way down the hill Erin was really starting to suffer & Linton & I started estimating our times for the course ahead & realized it would be virtually impossible to make the cut-off point on the next leg, even if we continued unranked. We decided we were not really interested in completing a shortened version of the course. We discussed this with the other team members & reached a consensus to withdraw. We offered to make a phone call & get the support Team to pick us up, but Erin stated very strongly that she wanted to return to HQ under her own steam.

We reached the bottom of the Mountain & completed the very flat 7km or so ride back to HQ. We rode in, pulled up at the desk, explained what we were doing & why, then turned around to find that in 10 seconds flat, Erin had fallen off her bike & was asleep on the ground. Everyone was pretty concerned, her pulse & blood pressure were taken & the signs were good, we knew she had been drinking & if you managed to wake her up she could tell you what day it was. We concluded she had just pushed herself to the brink of exhaustion.

We carried Erin back to the tent, put her in some clothes (under the supervision of her brother), made her drink some orange juice, popped her in a sleeping bag & she went off to sleep for about 6 hrs. In between having a few beers, red wines & eating the delicious pizza Paul & Josh had got from the Tavern last night, we kept checking Erin's pulse & breathing. When she awoke, she was completely revitalised & we were relieved.

Later that night we went to the Tavern for More Pizza, Hamburgers & Drinks. Despite not finishing, we were all feeling really good. By the time we arrived back at Camp we were all laughing our heads off from a combination of the "tired giggles" and a bit of alcohol. We all agreed we had had an excellent adventure which included a lot more than just the Race itself, and made a Pledge to come back for another crack next year.

Sitting back in Brisbane now 2 weeks later the memories are still very vivid & I'm sure they will remain that way for years to come. I remember the motto of the now defunct JLW Race "Making Life Memorable" – this certainly applies to Geoquest as well. The only thing is, as time goes by it becomes more disappointing we didn't finish.

I know we all came away from the race better friends than when we started. Hopefully the same team we will be back on the starting line next year, more experienced & better trained. I think we have all learnt a lot & now know which weaknesses to work on. Many thanks to Paul & Josh who did an excellent job as a support crew.

Thanks to the Race Organisers and volunteers who put on a good race and created a great atmosphere.

In retrospect Mt Yarrapahinni wasn't that bad & I would rather do it than find another bloody creek junction in the rain in the middle of the night.

