

GEOQUEST 06 TALES OF JUST TRIPPIN

Our team upgraded to the Geo full at registration on the Friday. We had managed to borrow my son's mirages as they were trying out new kayaks for the race, so we all agreed to make the plunge. I had completed the Geo half last year but my team mates, Tsalina, Luke and Andrew were rookies. We got through all the mandatory checks OK even though the water was a little on the brisk side. This was Andrew's first time in a sea kayak but he figured it was a bit bigger than his surf board and he would be fine. We started work on our maps after the briefing with all four of us working on the course. At 8.00pm it was down maps and pencils and off to the Geo twist carrying one buoyancy vest and a chocolate.

The twist was that one poor member of each team could swim out to a boat in the middle of the river and exchange a chocolate for a card which we could trade off to miss any one of a number of checkpoints on the course. We started undressing Andrew before he could argue with us and then he was off into the freezing water in his underpants and life jacket. It was a great sight and a huge laugh for the crowd, some team's representatives even did the swim naked.



Race day forecast was for clouds with a chance of rain later in the day. We had checked the forecast and we were prepared as best as we could for some rotten weather as the race went on. The race start was at 8.00am just on high tide. Thankfully for us novice sea kayakers the surf was

not too big and there was a reasonable break between the larger sets. We managed to get through the surf OK and we were off on a 12k kayak to Trial Bay.

LEG 1 Kayak 12km approx

There was a south east swell to head into and a few messy sections as we crossed from headland to headland. We were in around 2nd last place in the mixed kayaks as we neared trial bay with only two all male teams passing us as they started 15 min after the mixed. The exit at Trial Bay looked easy with only a few long rolling waves, the kayak in front of us went side on to the waves and rolled, I looked behind and they were starting to grow in size, one wave rolled under us and we were also side on to the waves, a quick lean into the wave and we stayed upright then into the beach. So far so good!

Trek 15 km approx

This was a good trek leg with some solid climbs around the hills at Trial Bay then onto the flat sandy areas. Most of the teams were jogging this section so we joined in, only walking up the hills and the rocky down hills. One of our first memorable quotes was made here by Luke, *"Wow, this race is not going to be too bad, we are already one 50th of the way through."* We passed a few teams on this leg with others also passing us, at least there were teams around us to keep up the momentum. This was a fun section.

Tube/swim 1.5km approx

After the run we jumped into our long wet suits as it had started to drizzle then onto a single tube for our swim down the river. The tide was running out at this stage and there were times where we could walk or push off the bottom to keep going. We had a short walk down the road to a boat ramp then another crossing of the Clybucca River which was around 150 m wide then on to the next CP. The current was a lot stronger at this crossing and we ended up around 100 m downstream of the TA. Andrew had towed me for most of this leg, but at least I offered to carry his tube while we were walking.



Kayak 10km

We were now heading back down river, then onto the river arm back to Stuarts point. We could see several teams ahead of us during this leg and picked up around 10min on the pack in front of us. The water was dead flat with the tide assisting us. The navigation was also easy and we managed to miss the odd sandbar.

We were still doing a steady pace and the quick changes between disciplines made the time fly by.

Tube 5km back to race HQ.

We jumped straight out of the kayaks, still in our wet suits then grabbed our tubes for the final stage of this leg. We had to visit 3 x CPs attached to channel markers on our way upstream. Once again the tide was out which meant we could walk or wade most of the way with a few short tube sections as we crossed the river. It was still drizzling but we were comfortable in our wet suits. Our times for these legs had us in around 30th place. We were still enjoying the race with the odd sing along to keep us going (this is something that came along with Andrew joining our team. I still only sing on the inside).

Transition

We had a 20 minute mandatory stop at this stage before our 50 min drive/ set up time to get to the next Leg of the race. We took our time at the TA to have some hot chunky chicken soup which was great and get into our wet weather gear. We decided to put on rain pants and gaiters for this leg as

we knew it would be wet and we saw all the cuts on Chris Clausen's leg from putting out CP's. This worked for us as it was cold wet and miserable for most of the night but we were all comfortable. We knew that this would be a long leg so we had plenty of food and water.



Andrew, Greg and Luke relaxing at the TA.

Bike rogaine 25km to 30km

As we arrived at the TA just on dark it began to rain steadily, we had to assemble a few of the bikes after the transfer. We were leaving on the rogaine as the leaders were completing it. The CP's were not difficult to find as we had the route and distances well marked. I was a little slow on the nav due to my glasses fogging up as soon as I stopped. Tsalina had a few falls in the wet as she skidded in the mud and had difficulty unclipping from the peddles. Andrew liked her comment ...*"Do you think that tiredness could be affecting my balance, inability to clip into my bike shoes, vision and reflexes?"* By now it was almost impossible to change gears on my bike as I had picked up a stick and bent the derailleur. Luckily the hills were not too steep. We had a lengthy stop when my chain jumped off and got wedged around the spokes. After talking to many of the competitors this was one of the hardest parts of the race as the weather took it's toll on the bikes. Due to a few break downs we had a slow rogaine, we picked up nine CP's on this leg. We arrived back at the TA with still many of the teams around us and there were still teams that had not started the bike rogaine.

Trek/rogaine 12km to 16km

We missed our first CP, probably because we were still talking and joking. We had a quick conference and changed our route and decided to pick up the missed CP on the way home. Next was the first of the creek CPs

They looked easy enough as long as you dropped in at the right point. We searched one creek for nearly an hour with three other teams. We met a team than had been looking for two hours and could not find it. Two Cp's down and five to go. Once again we walked past one of the tracks we needed and had to go back around a km to pick up the right trail. We arrived at the CP near the rail line only to find there was no crossing as marked on the map only a big cutting. We searched for around half an hour then saw a team come out at the top of the cutting having just picked up the CP. By now we had teamed up with Acuity and found the next couple of CP's together. Once again we had wasted time by walking past tracks, but at night when you are tired it is not as easy as it looks. It was now around 5am as we arrived back at the TA ready for the next bike stage.

Bike 24 km

This stage saw us heading east then climbing Mt Yarrahapinna, the only problem being we had to carry our bikes around 400m up the mountain as there was no access trail from the area we were coming from.

The hike a bike was damn hard. I have no idea how the leaders managed to get to the top in the dark as it was hard enough in the daylight. In places you were on your hands and knees. I found it easier to lift my bike uphill first then drag myself up. Every time I put it on my shoulder I got tangled in vines. Tsalina did it tough on this section, it took us around two hours to get to the top. Once over the top of the mountain it was mostly downhill to the bike/trek split. We had a few chats to some of the teams doing the split, they all told us to do the bike section clockwise to avoid going up the slippery single track. We saw one of the CP's on our way to the split and made a mental note of where it was.

There were still several teams at the TA, the other teams told us that it had been taking around three hours to complete the trek. Our problem was that Andrew and I could hardly walk with blistered feet, Tsalina had lost one jogger on the hike a bike, plus our bikes were a mess. We pushed on with Andrew and I taking around two hours to do the bike leg and Luke and Tsalina completed the trek in a little over two hours. We teamed up with Acuity on the bike leg and had a leisurely ride back to the TA. At the TA we had a quick chat and decided that we would not make the 6.00pm cut off on the next bike leg mainly due to the condition of our bikes and the need to attend to the soggy feet. We made good time back to the main transition area and we were looking forward to a good meal and putting our feet up. The weather had been good for most of the day and all seemed fine to complete the short course.



TA before leg 3

We arrived at the TA mid afternoon, as soon as we had checked in I raced over to see if Hugh Flower was still working on the bikes. Hugh said that there should not be any problems with replacing brakes, cables and adjusting the gears. We spent over two hours in the TA having showers, eating cleaning and preparing bikes to make sure the next leg went OK. We asked the support crew to pack sleeping bags for us as we would need a sleep before starting off on the final kayak leg. We set off on the final leg around 5.30pm confident that we could complete the short course by around 10am the next morning.

Bike leg on short course to Kayak

We had no idea where we stood in the field as we had stopped looking at the leader board long ago. I started the bike nav as I was feeling OK and the bike was running like a dream. Andrew had no granny gear so he walked a few of the hills on the way, he could walk as fast as the rest of us could peddle. About an hour into the leg Andrew snapped the chain as it did not like too much pressure being exerted on the hills. It took around 30 min to fix the break. We had another stop searching for one CP at the wrong intersection until someone checked the map. We had one more

food stop up on the top of the mountain range, thankfully out of the wind which was quite strong at this stage, we also had a 10min sleep. Then Andrew's comment "*Can I press the 3 minute snooze button? All proper alarm clocks have a 3 minute snooze button*" gave us a chuckle.

The down hills from here on were great, I was glad my brakes were working again. Luke took over the nav from here and he also picked up the pace which kept us awake.

We arrived at Taylors Arm to make our phone call, typically the phone was out of order and our CDMA phone had no service. Luckily the girl from the hotel reopened for us to let us make a call. The last leg of the ride was fairly fast on sealed roads, we passed one of the teams that had completed the full course, they looked knackered. Onto the kayaks!

Kayak leg approx 2km with portage

We arrived at the kayaks around 1am and found that the support crew had set up a lean to on the truck with beds and sleeping bags ready. We quickly had a bite to eat and dressed in warm kayak clothes, unfortunately Luke's wet suit was damp, then into bed for around a 30 min sleep. The sleep was great and we started this leg warmer and refreshed. Once again a run out tide was with us, with the full moon visibility was great and it did not take long to warm up. It took us around 90 min to get to the next CP at Macksville. Another short paddle and we pulled up to take on the portage. As we were getting out of the kayaks, Girls On Top pulled up and exited at the same point.

We fixed slings to the kayaks with Andrew carrying both fronts of the kayak with Luke and I at the rear, Tsalina carried the spare gear. The portage took around 50min with only a couple of stops. The girls were doing it tough carrying the mirages and we soon lost sight of them.

We finished the portage just on dawn, we were all in a good mood and glad the portage was over. Another short leg saw us pull into the TA with our support crew cheering us on, what a great feeling. We took around 15 min to have another bite to eat and change for the trek, not long now.

Trek approx 11km coasteering/beach run.

We were all feeling in good condition and agreed that we would run as much as we could, we were not expecting to see any teams on this last leg. We had just reached the grassy headland at Scotts Head where we were surprised to see another team about a km away, we picked up the pace as we did not know who the team was or if it was doing the full or short course. We lost sight of the team ahead while we ran along the beach to the first CP on this leg, as we reached the CP there was the other team above the CP on a cliff face looking for a way down. We were all hyped again and started running again. Apparently my memorable quote happened here "*I don't want to go through all the reasons why I'm running like a retard*" We came to another small headland and decided to go lower near the surf to find a crossing. While we were there we met the Pink Ladies who had already crossed the headland. The quickest way according to Andrew was to make a 2m jump into the surf as it ran out, then run to the other side, I said No as the surf was at least chest high when it came into the cave and I had visions of being swept out to sea, 10 seconds later Andrew had jumped and was yelling for us all to follow, he caught us as we jumped, the water was out and we ran to the other side just before the next wave crashed through, once again we were all yelling and yahooping. We caught up to the Pink Ladies just before Grassy Head and quickly picked up the next CP, still jogging all the way. On the last beach run we caught up to one more team, the last 11k had been a real buzz, off the beach then over the bridge to the Finish line. Andrew started his sing

along while we were on the bridge and once again there was our support crew waiting and cheering us on. We had made it in 49hours and to top it off we were the last ranked mixed team in 13th place. To our surprise we had the 5th fastest trek time and only 2min behind my son's team Hardtale.

Our support crew of Andrew O'Brien, Julie Hill and my wife Kerry had done an amazing job for us, they had only had around 4hrs sleep in the last 48hrs but they were as keen as ever. Andrew, Luke, Tsalina and I had just finished an amazing 48 hours of racing with more highs than lows. We did not get too lost, did not break anything, kept a steady pace had some good laughs and made some good team decisions along the way.

Thanks again to all the teams that we joined up with along the way and the help that they provided, the course was interesting, spectacular in places, hilly and challenging, the kayak leg through Macksville was a highlight to me. Thanks again to Craig, Louise and the Geo Team for a great race and some great memories.

GREG BACON