

More Training Required do the GEO (again)

I had this idea: Why don't we take a disposable camera and get some mid-race photos? Great idea – especially as Mike was going to carry it. 'Good job I took this then' he said as it came out of its bag, pristine and virginal two hours after the finish of the race.

So, no photos then. No photos of me dragging my weary arse up some simulated mountain in northern New South Wales in the middle of Saturday night.

The spell-checker won't recognise 'ARSE'. It thinks that it ought to be 'ass', but no one I know was dragging a donkey (or equivalent) up the hill in question that evening. Although some kind of pack animal would have been entirely appropriate.

And 'simulated' because although it was only 500 meters high it felt a lot further, and every inch of it a tedious pain in the, yes, arse.

I was last to the top. I'm always last. People only race with me because I book the caravan site early and do the paperwork.

Still, they're polite enough not to say that at the time, or later, or remind me that it was my idea to get involved in this bollocks in the first place.

It was a tougher race this year: The weather obviously; elements like the bike carry and the bike/trek split at the end of leg two; less time spent on main roads than I remember from previous races (especially on foot); some more intricate navigation; the distances seem about the same but the race felt longer – and certainly seemed to take longer.

As usual, damaged equipment and human breakages (with the weather a contributing factor) forced plenty of teams out of the race. But, yet again we were spared (through no particular virtue of our own) any significant gear failure or injury. Mike and I both ran out of brakes at different stages and Rob swapped onto the spare bike for the third leg – nothing major.

It was more straight-forward too, in some ways: The surf wasn't at all challenging and from our own perspective there were some other advantages:

- For the first time no-one in the team was carrying any significant injuries. This allowed us to run (more-or-less) the first trek leg and keep jogging and shuffling for pretty much the rest of the race.
- We had 'massive' Mike Paige to keep us honest, particularly during the treks and at the end of the race. Not to mention towing me across the strong out-going tide at the end of the first tube leg.

- Rob & Tim lead us through the Trek & Bike legs respectively, their excellent nav helping us to push ahead of the competition throughout the race and break clear of the surrounding pack on at least two occasions.

Unexpectedly finding ourselves at the head of the 'All Male' division tended to give us a bit of encouragement as did knocking on the door of the (still elusive, as it turned out) top-10. At one stage I thought that we might've cracked it, but not this time. Still, in 2004 we finished six hours behind 10th place; last year it was four and a half hours; this year it was less than an hour (just). Not for nothing are we called 'More Training Required'.

As ever, Craig and the gang produced an excellent race with some interesting twist and turns. Not to mention visits to beautiful bits of the countryside.

The creek bed linking two of the check points on Mount Martha Ann was a standout – a pristine spot complete with glow-worms and yabbies. The estuary run into HQ at the end of leg one was fun as well. The long-ish beach haul at the end should have been a pleasure – a clear, beautiful night with plenty of moonlight and a flat (for the most part) run – but by that stage it is only getting to the finish that matters. Someone asked me later if I felt elated crossing the finish line – they were a bit disappointed when I told them that, speaking personally, all I felt was an overwhelming sense of relief. Just at that moment (it's different in retrospect) I'd describe AR as a like beating your head against a brick wall: It's great when you stop.

The twists started with the get-out-of-jail-free cards ('massive' Mike going in for the team). We saved this until the end and played it on one of the last Mt M A CPs. It was a risk that the four checkpoints were in a circuit and that it wouldn't be useful. But, it was the right call for us as it turned out.

The bike and trek double was another twist: We didn't appear to follow the trend here, sending the trekkers to get three CPs, but it seemed to work.

Two car moves provided a brief respite (see photo) and kept the course interesting, avoiding the potential for a long road ride or trek – never that much fun.



The last paddle was a bit tricky – we all kept falling asleep. I disturbed the peace (and the primeval beauty of the last leg) by singing rugby songs at the top of my voice. We fell into a trap here during the portage. We tried to rig slings to carry the boats (mirage 780s) but they proved too awkward and (after quite a bit of stuffing about) we ended up doing what we should have done from the start: Shove the boats up on a shoulder and just get on with it.

All-in-all, a top race. We hung on to our all-male 1st place, finished with beer and pies (see photo) and, entirely unexpectedly, won prizes. If I'd thought about it at all (and I had never given serious consideration to the fact that we might win our division) I'd assumed that only premier mixed teams won prizes. So, thank you to GAR and Mountain Designs.



Hmmm...who was the logo modeled on?



I was a bit ungracious in my thank you speech – having a dig at Craig for the bike carry. Ungracious because all he could do was smile politely (which isn't really fair – sorry mate). Like the Mountain Design guys, when I had slept on it, I felt differently: I'm not hankering to do it again, but one of the things that I love about this sport is the unexpected and the requirement to turn-up and deliver on the day, no matter what. I also confess to enjoying the occasional looks of horror on people's faces when I tell them how we spent our weekend. There may be some things I'll forget about this race but I won't readily forget that hill.

A final thank you to Jen & Anna – the support crew: A superb job (as normal) in trying conditions. We love you both.

And remember – Eat More Pies.

Charlie
MTR