

riding but least technical navigation option and Ally and Anne tackled the trickier navigation options. This turned out to be the right split as they arrived at the next meeting point within minutes of each other. Feeling reasonably happy with themselves, the girls set off at high speed to the next TA only to find that their support crew were nowhere to be seen as they had forgotten to call them to tell them they were leaving CP 6! After a 20-minute wait the girls were on their merry way again disappointed for not having followed instructions but knowing better than to dwell on their mistakes and lose focus. The final leg of stage one was an estuary run followed by a beach trek back to the camp ground. A local Staffordshire terrier, nicknamed 'digger' by the girls, took a shine to the team and escorted them through the estuary to the beach.

What a lovely feeling it was coming into the cabin to a hot feed and a change of clothes. Oh that bed looked so nice! Before they knew it the girls were being whisked into the cars by the 'boys on the side' and driven off to the start of stage two at the Corindi River at Red Rock for a 16km paddle. It was here the girls made a strategic decision to portage their kayaks in the hope of cutting paddling time down they then smoothly navigated their way around the twists and turns of the various estuaries in the night getting the occasional slap in the face from fish confused by their lights.

The next 'mangroves by moonlight' run/swim leg saw the girls use their heads to collect all the dry controls before launching into the water to collect the water based controls. By the time the girls got to the water section the tide was in full flow and Debbie who went to test the waters did her fastest sideways hundred metres ever. Bearing this in mind the girls popped back into transition to pick up their body boards for extra support before heading across the channels in the dead of the night. The rest of this leg was spent floundering around in mangroves and swimming across deep channels, luckily no crocs were seen or heard!

Glad to be warm and dry and out of their wetties and full of two-minute noodles, the girls set off on their bikes ready to take on the 40km navigational and physically challenging ride ahead of them. Around midnight and about an hour into the ride the girls made the decision to stick to their sleep strategy and sneak off the track for 20 minutes of sleep. In previous races they had become inefficient in the later stages of the race due to sleep deprivation and they were determined not to let this happen again. Although a team passed them while they were snug as bugs in rugs, the girls were glad to have had their power nap as the ride turned out to be physically and technically challenging. Boy were they happy to see

'the boys on the side' at the transition before the final 3km beach trek to the campground for the end of stage two.

This time they arrived into camp to a feed of toast and spaghetti, boy those boys were good to them. Stage three consisted of a 25km trek through the Nymboida gorge, a 40km MTB, a 4km trek, a 13km MTB and a 3km beach trek. The whole leg bar the last beach trek was to be self-supported. This meant the girls needed to organise food and water for 17 – 19 hours and to make sure they had all the gear, maps and instructions required. They were more than aware that the race organisers had warned teams not to underestimate this leg so spent a reasonable amount of time in this transition making sure they had got it right.

Once again they were bundled into the car for a car drop to the start of the trek. The corner riddled one-hour drive was enough to make Debbie car sick and boy was she glad to get out of the car and on to the trek. By this time it was daylight and the girls were injected with a new blast of energy as they strode off into the wilderness. The Nymboida gorge was stunning with massive rock cliffs, sheer waterfalls and miles of untracked forest. Once again Anne's accurate navigation paid off and Debbie and Ally's tracking skills came into play. They also had to dig deep in order to cross the full flowing river as it plummeted into a deep pool some distance beneath them. They were so focused in this stage of the event that Debbie didn't even notice that she had walked over a snake. A huge 20cm snake!

It was only on the following 40km bike leg that the girls dared to believe that they may finish in a reasonably good time and

may even sneak into the top ten. Half way through this ride the heavens opened and it began to pour down. Keen to escape the rain and the ever increasing sticky muddy roads as well as try to get some of the next trek done in daylight the girls pushed hard to the next transition. They arrived just on dark, quickly put their warm Smartwool tops, hats and pants on and headed off into the second part of the rogaine to get the two remaining controls. Aware that this section could make or break them Anne made sure she was on the ball with the navigation and followed the map every step of the way. As a result of this the girls made quick work of this section and exited 25 minutes ahead of the first male team after going in 15 minutes behind them.

Wow, only a 13km downhill MTB and a 3km beach trek to go. With this in mind and the knowledge that they had requested hot guys with hot towels, the girls were on fire and they sped off down the road averaging 40km an hour. This is a feat that was only made possible for Debbie, Anne and Zoe due to their new full suspension Ellsworth Truths, Ally on her carbon Scott has been riding like this for years. The girls skidded into transition, had a quick chat to the boys and then jogged off down the beach for the final 3km beach run, remembering to walk in the non-competitive nature reserve zones.

Wow, what a race! The girls finished 8th overall, beat all the all-men's teams and won the all-female category.

They now have their sights on the Bull of Africa in August (if they can secure sponsorship) and another of their favourite events organised by the Geocentric team, the XPD Expedition race in the high country of VIC and NSW in Australia in November.

