

Geo 2008 – Cowgirls do the Round-up!

Well, after 4 years of trying, the Cowgirls finally got to do their job – round up a herd of cows.... It was like those little cows were put there **just for us** – or were we possibly hallucinating?? As we all know, you don't necessarily believe what you see when you head into the 2nd night at the Geo..... More on the little cows later....

The adventure went a bit like this.....

Four nervous Cowgirls set off from the calm, sheltered port of Coffs Harbour for a long journey on water - that took us north to the little village of Woolgoolga. Cowgirls, being much happier with 2 legs on dry land (or over saddles) were completely out of their comfort zone during this 26k paddle! We rode up and down over the increasing swells with quiet trepidation and it was 'smiles all round' when we made a very safe landing into the TA at a protected cove – a few scary moments out there, but, unlike some other teams, we managed to stay firmly inside our trusty sea kayaks!

Going surfing was not really our thing either, but luckily we had a coastal Cowgirl in our midst and, along with the mighty **Thor**, we took a few brilliant waves, and relaxed our nerves after the treacherous outer ocean worries!

A quick run through town – Thor was very excited navigating via a Google Earth map – “look, we are now running past the building with the blue roof....”.... and we made it to our bikes with our crew a bit rushed to get to the TA before us!

An interesting uphill ride followed and we got to the Rogaine and grabbed the required CP's.... had no trouble with these, it seems... and then we were off to the MTB split which we didn't think out quite so well, with 2 gals waiting 45mins for the others to arrive back – as we have experienced before, Cowgirls are much happier travelling in herds – and the splits do not suit our style! Happy back together we rode to the final beach trek and headed 9k north back to HQ for the finish of Leg 1.

A car drop at Corindi Creek kicked off Leg 2 and we experienced a beautiful night paddle watching the moon set! Back to TA where our wonderful crew were waiting patiently in the cold....they quickly dressed us in our wetsuits, handed us our boogie boards and watched us paddle across into the mangroves for a fun, but cool, mangrove run/plod/float.... We had a few laughs as we became the 'floating Cowgirls' getting swept along (somewhere!) by the incoming tide.....And then a run through the middle of town, carrying boogie boards, and wearing wetsuits was a bit special – not your usual dress-up for a Saturday night in town, as some spectators noticed! A 40k MTB took us through forests and back to Sandy Beach (not sure we made the **best** route choice!)....then a 3k walk south back to Emerald Beach and HQ.....some yummy breakfast was prepared by our crew and then we were bundled up in the vehicles for the long

drive to a remote area when we would have daylight for the spectacular trek through the Nymboida Gorge...

With some of our compulsory break time still remaining, we chatted to officials at the TA (the lovely **Kirsty** was all smiles!)... We saw **MD's** finish the trek, not looking too joyful??...and prepared our MTBs for the next transition...as our crew were heading back to HQ for some much needed rest!.. Hmmmm.....lucky them.... We had to leave enough food and water with the bikes... and we all seemed to have a truck-load of stuff – especially **Tamsin** (our resident Eating Machine..)..

We were excited to be starting the incredible trek – undoubtedly the highlight of the event.....Slow and steady we made our way into the gorge, and finding a handy worn 'track' to the first CP was a definite advantage. We were lucky enough to make this trek in the daylight... So many Oooooohs and Ahhhhhhs were heard from Cowgirls as we gazed at the awesome cliffs and beautiful forest in this area..... A couple of tricky crossings put us a bit on edge – but we all made it in tact..... Before leaving the gorge we had a brief stop on a rock to take in some nourishment and discard some clothing... **and went for a quick skinny-dip to enjoy the water**...(no, that last bit didn't really happen....but, it was tempting at the time as the day was getting warm.....!!!!)

We momentarily struggled locating the next CP (you know that one in the creek junction – so **many** junctions!).... And the Cowgirl consensus was to go out and make a second approach. We found it on 'take 2'... albeit, only a few metres from where we were searching the first time – oh well, that's the frustrating part of Adventure Racing... especially on day 2 when we were all getting a little tired!!

Happy to be on our way back, we joined a few other teams who had missed the last CP and abandoned... we gave them some sound Cowgirl advice, and they headed back for a 2nd attempt as well..... **then** we ran into Matt (course photographer...) and it seemed he was completing his own little adventure race, having trekked the whole gorge too!!!! Nice job Matt....

Back to the TA and we rolled out on the 40k ride back to the site of the Leg 1 rogain where we had to locate 2 extra CP'sThis ride was challenging to say the least. We started off on the advertised 'downhill'... and then the rain set in. We stopped in a town to don our jackets and warm gear – and discard some of our excess food and water we had taken from the last TA..... luckily we did, as a very long uphill followed. On the way, we were flagged down by a male team to render first aid to one of their members – so (Dr) Tamsin pulled out her medical chest and we 'stitched' up his leg with butterfly clips (ok, so T, that wasn't really just all food inside your unbelievably heavy pack!!).... and went on our way...a bit tired, wet and miserable at this time so motivation was necessary....songs, and words of encouragement all round kept us going when things were getting tough. Night set in.... and this is when we found the little cows! Grinding up one of the many hills, we saw in the distance, tiny lights (in sets of twos!) – Like little aliens looking down at us.... On closer observation, our forward scout, **Alison**, realised, no, we were not about to be abducted, we were, in fact, face-to-face with a herd of little cows!!! Just then the Cowgirl instincts took over, and we knew what we

had to do..... Up we rode, hooting, herding and laughing – and absolutely in our element! The little cows moved themselves slowly back up the hill and scattered into surrounding bushland, under the close eyes of the 4 Geo Cowgirls!!! We know they were really there because little green cow-pats dotted the track for a few 100m afterwards... and we had a revelation about our purpose in this event! Did anyone else see them?.....I wonder! Seriously, we are positively sure this really happened.....Hmmmmmm.....

Finally made it to the TA for the final rogaine – and a mud-fest awaited us! Teams were having difficulty with the CP's – fatigue had definitely set in and the rain hadn't let up!

Track walking is a great way to fall asleep on your feet – and Thor was experiencing this phenomena at this time – so was **Aunty Jan** - but didn't let on, and managed to have couple of micro-sleeps while standing up waiting for the Nav decisions.....a little jog back down the hill woke us all up from our hazy sleepiness and we found our bikes and headed off on a well-worn track for a 13k 'fun' downhill to Sandy Beach. We decided someone had got that 'fun' word a bit wrong..... wet, muddy, steep bits were our real memory of this ride – and we were very happy Cowgirls to see the lights of Sandy Beach in the distance! Happy, too, as we knew we were going to finish before the end of the 2nd night – which hasn't happened before in a Cowgirl Geoquest team. With our spirits lifted we greeted our gorgeous crew with smiles and race 'blabber' (you know, that wide-eyed, loud, meaningless talk that comes with sleep deprivation, mixed with extreme physical, and mental, exertion) The lovely Kim – who had finished the previous night in a **much** faster team – had hitched a ride with our crew to be present at our last TA..... We were on auto-pilot as we changed from muddy bike shoes to runners for the final trek....and we headed the wrong way onto the beach which had the crew alarmed and yelling at us..... "Well that's the way we went last time", we said.... Apparently we could have taken a much easier route last time too – but, I guess, that just wasn't our style....We took our time on the final trek – as we knew we had it conquered. Our wonderful crew met us at the finish line (it was about 2.00am) with the obligatory bottle of champagne that we Cowgirls love to reward ourselves with.... Photos, hugs and stories followed, and we headed back to camp for a bite to eat and a **well earned sleep !!!!**

So, another Geo in the bag... There is something about this race that makes us keep on coming back for more....the 'little cow' thing was a brilliant addition to this year's event ... (Did you arrange that for us Craig?) ... and finishing before the end of the 2nd night gave us the ability to function properly (ie: ease back into reality) the next day , which is a huge bonus when we had to split the herd and head back to our distant parts of the country....

Many thanks to our brilliant crew of 'Milo makers' – Helen, Rod & Ellie.... Hope you gained a sense of belonging and camaraderie from your great efforts in getting us through this epic event.... And hope you have been inspired to have a go at something like this for yourselves one day....

It's a beautiful world..... See you out there!

**Xxxx Aunty Jan
on behalf of Tamsin, Thor and Alison
The COWGIRLS TRI ADVENTURE**