

GIRLS ON TOP

Anything Men can do
we can do also!



Men aren't the only one's who love a challenge.

No-matter the obstacles it seems clear, that Women of Action have no fear!

The Girls on Top Adventure racing team have just returned from a very successful result in the Geo Quest 48 hour Adventure race in Australia. Here is how it all came about.

This year the race was held in Coffs Harbour, NSW, Australia. Apart from the infamous "Big Banana" this location got the thumbs up from the girls because of the warmer temperatures and also the existence of the airport, meaning the NZ based team members could fly directly from Sydney and save themselves a six hour drive.

Racing overseas is never an easy undertaking but this is one race where everything seemed to come together for the girls. The first coup for the girls was securing support from www.smartwool.com to cover the entry fee and keep them warm and snug during the event, the second was being able to find Ruahine Adventure Duet kayaks for the event from Steve at Q Kayaks, the third was the arrival of three new hot pink Ellsworth Truth mountain bikes www.ellsworthbikes.com in time for the event and the help from www.bikesmiths.co.nz in Albany to get them made up, the fourth was that they had a very experienced support crew team made up of Craig Gibson (NZ) and Steve Cooper (sleepmonsters.com.au) and the fifth was that they scored themselves a cabin right in the main transition area.

The team for this event was made up of three of the original Girls on Top, Debbie Chambers, Anne Lowerson and Ally Davey and newcomer Zoe Albon. As with every race their goal was to race their own race as efficiently and effectively as possible. After their experience of losing focus and struggling to make sound decisions at around 35 hours in their last 48 hour race, they even put a sleep strategy in place and planned to grab a twenty minute nap on the first night.

The course was revealed at 3pm on the Friday afternoon and Anne and Debbie then spent the afternoon and early evening plotting the checkpoints and working out route choices, whilst Ally, Zoe and the "boys on the side" sorted out the food and logistics of transporting gear etc to the various transitions around the course. The race consisted of a total of 259 kms with 155 kms of mountain biking, 42 kms of kayaking, 55 kms of trekking and 7 kms of other. For logistical purposes it was broken up into three stages.

Race start was 7.00am on Saturday morning and after a few nervous dashes to the loo and the obligatory photo shoot, they found themselves lined up on the start line ready to tackle the first discipline of stage one which was a 26 km kayak from Coffs to Woolgoolga. Helmets were compulsory on this paddle so it was with some trepidation that the girls left the beach wondering what type of surf landing was in store for them. The paddle along the coastline was particularly stunning but it was the thought of seeing hump back whales that really excited the team. Unfortunately, the three – four meter swells and building Southerly meant that looking around was an absolute no no and all concentration was needed to keep the boats upright. The Duets were perfect for the conditions though and the girls made good time on this leg only stopping for a couple of feed the fish sessions due to Anne's sea sickness. Much to their relief the landing was in a sheltered cove and offered no real challenge.

The kayak was followed by a body board which the girls executed with such finesse that Debbie and Ally ended up coming in on the same wave and nearly taking each other out!! This was followed by a simple urban run of 3km, a 7km uphill ride to Wedding Bells forest where they did an 8km foot rogain which required them to make decisions about which points to collect and which to leave for later and called for some off track navigation. Anne's navigation was impeccable and the team worked extremely well together sniffing out tracks and spotting checkpoints to ensure relentless forward motion was a top priority. The next 25 km mountain bike leg required them to split up in order to collect all the checkpoints most efficiently. Zoe and Debbie took the most exciting riding but least technical navigation option and Ally and Anne tackled the trickier nav 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.

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What a lovely feeling it was coming into the cabin to a hot feed and a change of clothes. Oh that bed looked soooo 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 Corrindi River at Red Rock for a 16 km 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 meters 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 40 km navigationally 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 25 km trek through the Nymboida gorge, a 40km MTB, a 4km trek, a 13 km MTB and a 3 km 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 onto the trek. By this time it was day light 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 nav 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 focussed 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 40 km 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 rogain 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 13 km downhill MTB and a 3 km 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 40 kms 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 three km 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.

Girls on Top are passionate about encouraging women to try adventure in the outdoors, and invite you to join them, in becoming Women of Action!

Visit www.girlsontop.co.nz

For updates on events, sponsorship, gear, training & nutrition.

Supporting a Girls Quest for Adventure!

