

Geoquest, June 5-8 2009 (Forster NSW)

*Racing with Richard Mountstephens, Sam Maffett and Kris Plain as team **Dude Where's my Bruno**. Words by Richard Mountstephens*

Mountain Designs GeoQuest 48hr is Australia's premier adventure race. It involves 48+hrs of non-stop endurance racing in the major disciplines of trekking, mountain biking and kayaking. Mixed, Male or Female teams of four must navigate their way through an arduous 200+km course that is only revealed to them the evening before the race.

It was a bit of a trip in to the unknown for this year's June long weekend adventure racing pilgrimage to Geoquest. Katrin's decision to swap support crew duties for a racing bib triggered the construction of a new team with newcomer Kris Plain, who'd never raced more than 6 hours before, and the experienced Sam Maffett joining us to race as "Dude, where's my Bruno" in honour of Bruno the support crew van. A flippant last minute choice of team name that would turn out to be slightly embarrassing when, to many people's surprise, we won.

The course handout on Friday night promised an interesting linear trip from Barrington tops back down to Forster and a journey through the Great Lakes region. Much to Katrin's horror, it also promised a sh*tload of paddling with over 60km on the ski almost double what I told her she would be getting herself in to.

Cycling 2:02:00

Absolute cracker of a first leg, dropping 1000m on the bike from the peak of Barrington tops with a couple of checkpoints on the way. As expected the lead teams took off like nutters and duly overshot the first checkpoint. Partly I suspect because the leg was slightly wider than an A4 sheet and no one dared stop to refold the map, which meant getting caught out when the map turned out to be a bit wrong around the control.

Ride of shame back past the field to collect the checkpoint, then settled in for a quick ride down to the rogain in a group with Apex, Blackheart (Rob & Kathryn), Keen, Mountain Designs & Austrelaps.

Orienteering 1:03:00

Quick transition in to a short but steep rogain through some very pretty rainforest, and obligatory pleasant creeks. We stayed out of the creeks which seemed to be a good choice as we got back first. I also discovered with my forehead that the big green leaves are stinging nettles.

Cycling 2:09:00

Back on to the bikes and a solid 400m climb up over a range towards Gloucester. Katrin snapped her chain halfway up, which meant for 10 minutes of pfaffing that let Austrelaps and MD's past. Then onto a highlight of the weekend, a classic descent down a huge very steep farm spur - not really on a track - with spectacular post card backdrop if you dared to look up.

Life's little lesson #239. If you ride through a cow paddock, the mud on the nozzle of your waterbottle is not just mud. Urgh.

This meant the end of the first section as the white water paddle was cancelled due to river levels. We arrived at TA 5 minutes behind Austrelaps and MD's, with Apex, Blackheart, Keen and co. spread out over the following 20 minutes.

Race then stopped with 3 hours allocated to transport teams back to Forster for a restart in the boats. Notable on the drive back was being stopped by a breathalizer, and the confused look of the cop upon seeing the van's occupants and equipment.

We were pretty happy with how we'd gone so far. Still trying to get the hang of moving together as a new group - a bit disjointed on the bikes - but getting on well and enjoying the journey. Katrin was a bit surprised by the pace of the riding the field set, but on the flipside I was surprised that her

cannondale



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running was showing early signs of impressiveness. Kris was cruising and starting to relax, and Sam was enjoying himself.

Kayak 2:15:00 22.0 km

The first part of the course had felt like a bit of a prologue, with the race proper starting back at Forster after the 3 hour break. From here the course was a big day-long anti-clockwise loop down to Buladelah and back through Myall lakes.

Every now and then in the long races, you find yourself somewhere at just the right time. And so it was at the beginning of this paddle, as we headed out of Forster at sunset up a glassy Wang Wauk river, dodging dolphins out of the boat ramp and with a strong following tide to keep things moving. Made sure we enjoyed the moment.

And equally quickly it gets tough again, as the sun drops, the temperature plummets, and the course takes you to a shallow, smelly section of rock-filled river under a highway bridge. Noice.

The navigation on this paddle was tricky, so we pushed hard to get through the crux of it before the light faded completely. Sam and Kris set the tempo in the XT double, and Katrin had a crash course in wash-riding in the front seat of the Mark 2. Reasonably happy with how the boats were moving, but impressed by Blackheart's form as they came past near the end.

No major dramas on this paddle, expect for Katrin being a bit under-dressed and hence cold for the last hour. Also lost a few minutes when we ran in to a submerged tree and got pinned against it by the tide.

Into an absolutely freezing TA next to the highway, and the race proper began. We saw all of Blackheart, Apex, MDs, Austrelaps and Keen at this transition and headed out on to the bike rogain within 20 minutes of each other. Game on.

Cycling 65.0 km

Slow transition for us – dropped 10minutes – but the only bad one for the race which in the scheme of things was pleasing for a team of newbies and support crew all over 70.

The next section had 14 checkpoints spread over 60k of riding and 20k of running, of which you had to collect 11. We opted for skipping one CP on the ride, and taking the wider road options to avoid what looked like a potential mudfest through the Wang Wauk state forest.

Party time for the hour or so with the top 5 teams crissing and crossing each other, with route choice and small mistakes offering plenty of opportunity for banter. A ripper of a steep rocky descent in to the 3rd checkpoint with the group before things spread out and quietened down.

Tracks were less muddy than expected, but we stuck with the originally planned low-risk route. One thing we hadn't factored in to planning is that riding on bitumen for long periods in the middle of the night sends you to sleep, and Katrin (mountain biker at heart) began to fade with the snoozies. When she eventually fell asleep and rode in to the long grass along the side of the old highway, decided a 5 minute powernap was worth a try and she settled in for a kip on the verge.

Seemed to work, and we slowly regained momentum with the only remaining frustration a turn down an unmarked track to waste 10 minutes.

Rolled in to the Buladelah show ground around midnight together with MDs to dump the bikes with Blackheart and Apex 40 minutes down the road and Austrelaps 20 minutes behind them.

Running 3:44:00 20.0 km

Across the Pacific highway and up the hill overlooking Buladelah for a spot of rock climbing before descending in to the annual Geoquest scrub bash on the other side.

Another one of those entertaining race moments, with MD's and the volunteers at the rock climbing checkpoint knocking out a rousing rendition of Happy Birthday to herald the beginning of Katrin's birthday in the scrub.

Dodgy descent off the other side of the hill, with Sam doing an excellent job of ferreting a way through a large lantana patch before we stumbled on to an unmarked track. At this point we went right and MDs went left, giving me a feeling that one of us wouldn't be coming out of there for a while.

Our call turned out to be the good one, and we found ourselves having reeled in Apex and Austrelaps at the final CP overlooking the lakes.

Real race feel now as the 12 of us ran as a pack for the next 5k into transition with a steadily increasing pace – Christie doing a good job of jumping on the front to raise the tempo if things slowed with thoughts of Blackheart up ahead.

Arrived at TA suprised to find no one there yet, and into the raft building race.

Rafting 2:12:00, 6.0 km

Next leg was to traverse 6km across 2 lakes using 8 inner-tubes and 4 planks of wood, with a 1km portage in the middle.

Ex-scout Kris constructed our raft in the time it took me to put on my wetsuit, and off we headed in a head-to-head 2km/hr race across the lake in the dark. Consensus was that we looked absurd.

Missed the portage entrance with Apex, and spent 10minutes bashing around in a swamp looking for it before trudging across to the next lake.

Rafting across one lake was kind of fun. Rafting across a second was like being told the same joke again – not funny. Grumpied our way across then in to the skis for a big paddle across Myall lakes to the coast.

Kayak 2:32:00, 22.0 km

Timing for this one not great. Just happened to arrive at the same time as a squall, so rather than a glassy cruise we had a 15kt breeze and windchop right on the beam.

Katrin hasn't paddled rough water before, so doing it in the reasonably twitchy Mark2 (and steering) was a bit comfort-zone expanding. A tad zig-zaggy but we got there.

Did the 1.5k portage in the middle well, and was suprised to see Apex not that far ahead when we hit Smiths lake, suggesting either they'd missed time or had some tiredness on board. In the end our split on this leg looks pretty good – not really sure how.

Running (with a lake wade) 3:19:00, 20.0 km

20km run now from Smith Lake sandbar, through Booti Booti national park and up 7 mile beach to Wallis Lake.

But first a 1km crossing with redundant inner-tube and PFD to sandbar beach, as the lake was mostly wade-able. Wouldn't have minded so much, except it meant carrying a 4WD tube and PFD for the next 20k. Thanks.

We were all feeling pretty good at this stage, and with Sam knowing the area pretty well decided to put our heads down and see what happened. We got through the dodgily marked track area around the golf course well thanks to Sam, and came across Apex just ahead at the CP at Bluey's beach – they'd lost some time around the golf course.

Apex hadn't seen us, and when the opportunity to take a parallel street through town came up we hammered to try and get past without being spotted. We did in fact get past and stayed out of sight for a couple of k, but were seen just before leaving town.

With a 12km paddle to come, we had 9km of running to try and build a gap – not particularly confident in holding off those guys in a paddling race.

Pedal to the metal for the 4km up 7 mile beach, and then an all-time pb transition in to the boats on Wallis lake.

Kayak 1:13:00, 12.0 km

Support crew had it dialled for this one – boat, paddles, map, etc were all ready on the water's edge, and as we'd just run 20k pretty much in paddling gear it was just a matter of chugging a Red Bull and jumping in. Were there for about 30 seconds I think.

Pushed up the lake for a cracking paddle split and first home with a nice reception from the kids and crew.

Big day out. We had a ball.

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