

Mountain Designs Geoquest 2011 (10th Anniversary) Nambucca Heads

Team Mountain Designs An account of our Adventure - in places you would rather be!

Friday – Registration/Competency Checks/Briefing

The new look team MD's were all fired up and rearing to go! Our two "newbies" Pikey and Paul arrive at the campsite.....we practice inflating and deflating the blow up raft, and I have a go of the retractable dog leash style towing system that Pikey has mounted to his bike....and it's all looking good! Pikey wanders around modelling the new superlight weight Gore-Tex Mountain Designs Jacket (there are only a few in the country and Team MD's have a chance to test the gear at Geo).....and he looks the part! We have our team photo taken with our new merino wool electric blue thermals ona great base layer to keep you warm in the coldest places! Pikey and Paul get their first paddle of the "Double Fenn" and they have their first practice at a capsize and re entry.....if only they knew what was to come! ■■■ Kim and Gary look very comfortable on the Fenn.....



Now..... following the competencies most teams spent the final minutes before briefing packing gear and equipment and getting food organised for the race.....well that's what the Tri Adventure Vintage Cowgirls Team was doing.....but not Gary.....our Team MD's captain was helping his daughter Sarah through the Geoquest Kids race.....



We all attend race briefing with our support crew Kylie (Gary's wife) and Rob Pommie (Kylie's best friend) and listen intently whilst munching on some hot chips.....it was cool and breezy and we needed to keep warm and concentrate....as there was a lot to take in! Soon after Gary and Kim spend hours preparing maps and route choices and calculating distances etc as Pikey and Paul look on, eager to pick up as much about the course as they can! Pommie and Gary's daughters (Emily,

Charlotte and Sarah) contact our maps as Kylie prepares an amazing feast for the masses.....and before we can let our heads rest on our pillowswe must prepare our gear (food/clothes/equipment) for Leg 1 & 2 of the race.....and somehow have everything organised for our support crew to take to the transitions!

Saturday – Race Start Shelly Beach

We had been warned that there was a big southerly swell on its way and part of the course had been changed to a car move due to threats of torrential rain later in the day.....but the Paddle would still go ahead as planned.....but we were to be a bit careful when coming in at Hungry Head....

8am we get the signal to commence **Leg 1**and we are off.....Gary and I paddle, paddle, paddle out through the breakers and take an early lead.....but there is carnage behind us as the boys struggle to get out.....it takes us a long time to find them as the whole entire field passes us by and we see Pikey and Paul clinging to the ski trying so desperately to get back on!

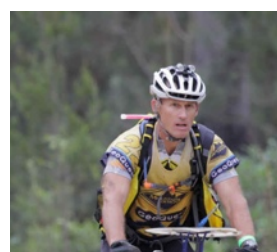
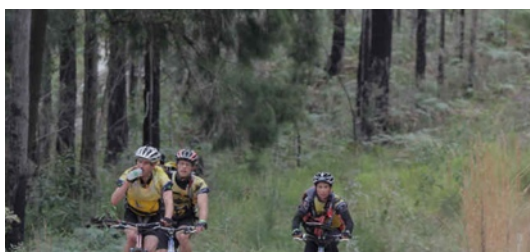
So our mindset changes instantly....there will be no wash riding on the leaders.....instead we are at the back of the field assisting teams who are struggling to stay in.....including our own! Gary is amazing....he is very comfortable in these conditions.....we paddle up to capsized kayaks to see if they are ok, gather up lost paddles and even have to



stop Pikey and Paul's ski from blowing away as they both were swimming desperately to catch it.....Paul was lucky to get a tow on the back of another kayak to bring him back to the ski that Gary and I were somehow holding onto whilst waiting for the boys! We finally get to Hungry Head however we have given the leaders about 1 hour and 15 minutes head start! It is cool and overcast so we change out of all our wet gear and into warm dry cycle gear for Leg 2.



Leg 2 is a cycle split and pack raft! On the way to the first CP we have to cross under the highway and we get wet up to our waists..... Why in this sort of racing does that always seem to happen just after you spend time getting dry????? We soon to split into two....Gary and Pikey head off to get CP D,G & I and Paul and I go for A,B,C & E and we manage to meet up as planned, so Gary shoots off to get H and Pikey, Paul and I get J on the way to the pack-raft section.█



Here we soon find ourselves madly trying to inflate our rafts..... we are quick to get onto the water and our method of two bikes on the back of the raft and us on the high front with two plastic paddles works well..... our paddle handles break but still work.....we pass the "Tri Adventure Vintage Cowgirls" along the way.....their set up of four bikes on one raft being dragged by 4 people in the other did not look comfortable.....and in fact they had the slowest time for the leg.....Gary did offer to help tow them for bit....but they could see the end in sight.... so they declined the offer only to soon almost loose their bikes in the Kalang River when the raft tipped..... but lucky rafts and bikes float!



We soon set off on **Leg 3**, the paddle up the Kalang River. Paul and Pikey are glad this is a flat water paddle this time....they manage to sit on our wash as we navigate our way through the oyster leases and soon we see Diggy (Kylie's dad one of our support crew) sprinting up the bank of the river showing us where do disembark our craft.....we have a lightning fast transition to **Leg 4** which is pack rafting on foot! We are starting to make up some lost time now so we and our support crew very excited! The four of us jump into one raft and paddle outrigger style across the Kalang River to CP 6 then Paddle across the Bellinger River to collect CP 7.....the raft is quickly deflated before we cross the mangrove swampy area on our way to the beach.....Pikey and Paul are quite glad we are running and not paddling now! We are soon into the TA and our support crew is in action.....a little spot for each of us to sit with all our gear laid out ready.....the next leg is a bike/foot leg.....and it's beginning to rain.....we put on our cycle gear and off we go again.....I do remember someone shoving three ginger-nut biscuits into my mouth at this TA.....yummy!

So we set off onto **Leg 5** and are instantly challenged by some sandy trails and a creek crossing.....we opt to go around and stay dry ☺ It is beginning to get dark and we are just getting to our first on foot CP. As we head up to the creek junction we are informed by another team there is some of that Nasty "stinging tree" ahead.....Gary show's us what it looks like and we keep our eyes peeled.....as apparently it stings for weeks.....when having a look around for CP U I managed to brush by a baby one and it got my little finger.....but I managed to just grit my teeth and ignore it.....there is now heaps of wait a while as well and heaps of overgrowth to make this CP a challenge.....but after a little scoot up the wrong creek line we are back on track and soon locate the CP. We now have our AY UP lights on and we soon set off on our bikes.....we have quick transitions as we decided to ride with our Salomon Trail Shoes and toe clips.....we are starting to catch up to other teams now and meet up with Team SCAR coming out of CP X and meet up with them again when we spend too much time wandering around in a wet overgrown creek bed.....it was raining heavily and we opted to put on our Mountain Designs Gore-Tex Jackets.....my MD's Flash Jacket was just awesome..... So we collected 4 of the 7 CP's on offer as required and soon found ourselves at the TA ready for the assault on the infamous Syndicate Track. I changed into dry clothes.....and put on all my wet weather gear because when I stopped I was freezing.....BIG mistake.....because we had a 16k Leg and it was ascending 800m..... After a feed at the TA we set off on **Leg 6**.

This was an amazing hike.....we were on flat roads and trails for about 3 k before we hit the Syndicate track.....and it just climbed and climbed and climbed..... Pikey was so strong here – towing Paul up the hill.....I did not feel so great as I had cooked myself in my wet weather gear....so had to remove a few layers.....we finally made it to a sign.....showing us where "the Bull wheel" waswe missed one of the tracks so unfortunately we took the long way around.....but finally got the opportunity to count the 24spokesthis would have been so beautiful in the daytime on a nice sunny day....but it was wet and cold and now freezing as we had made it to the top of the ridge.....we still had about another 5k to the top

where we would see our support crew....as it had flattened out significantly we found ourselves running the last bit to keep warm.....we were met at the top by our support crew and were quickly hijacked and thrown in the car as we were informed that our 1hr compulsory car move time did not start till we drove out.....I was so excited to see Tim and Caroline (the Coff's Connection) and managed to steal a warm hug before I was shoved in the car for our rather scary descent..... Now we were originally meant to ride.....but due to the wet weather we had a car move.....so CP's 15,16,17 were abandoned as our support crew attempted to drive the vehicles down the steep range.....I was scared.....Diggy was doing an awesome job driving but we were steaming up the car insideso it was very difficult to see.....Kylie was feeding us as Pikey and I sat there all under a sleeping bag in the back seat. I scooped down some of Kylie's mum very very nice hot pumpkin soup (full of lots and lots of vegies) and think I fell asleep.....waking find that we had got to the bottom and 57 minutes had no passed.....we were allowed to set off in 3 minutes! Well we did not get away that quickly! I got out of the car and started shivering uncontrollably.....so I had to change into dry clothes as it was going to be a long cold night..... So again stupidly I piled on all the wet weather gear and soon found myself overheating.....I should have just opted for the jacket and not rain pants as well.....

Leg 7 started with a compulsory SMS to race HQ to let them know we had made it safely down the hill.....the CP was beside a bridge and the phone wrapped up in a dry bag.....all teams did this for safety reasons..... At this stage we were all fired up as we had been informed by our support crew that we were now in 5th place.....and there were two teams that were just 20 minutes ahead.....so we were devastated when we could not locate CP19.....we attacked it from every angle.....we found the track junctionwe re read the description (Track Junction – Obvious on Road) and searched and searched and searched! We hiked our bikes up and down hills, across creeks over and over as skipping a CP would mean a 4hr penalty and we had already been searching over and 1½ hours.....we meet Team CBD and they too have looked and looked and looked.....then one of their team finds the CP 250m up a hill on a track.....we are excited to have found it but not happy that it has been incorrectly set.....as there was no junction where it was hung.....but as we know that's a part of adventure racing that you have to deal with.....anyway we push our bikes and my hike a bike practice comes in handy as we arrive at the TA in Bellinghen ahead of Team CBD and prepare for **Leg 8**.

Our support crew tells us we have about 2hrs till sun up.....so I assume it is about 4am..... and we have a pretty long trek with no support at the end of it.....this is so our support crew can finally get some sleep.....So we load up with some food for the trip....i don't eat much as I don't like to eat much before a run.....and we set off through the streets of Bellinghen and onto the Kalang Road. Pikey is on fire.... setting an awesome pace and we manage to run most of the way clipping CP22 at Reids Road before heading into the bush.....the first track we look for is not there....so we figure that a lot of this trek will be off track..... we cross paths with a few GEO HALF teams and cross a creek at a fallen down Bridge before the big climb up to CP23.....something goes wrong here.....Pikey is starting to fade.....he looks terrible and Gary put's him on tow..... Team CBD now have us in their sights as we climb to the top of the knoll.....I find the CP and stand there with the punch and a smile.....clipping everyone's wrist bands.....Andrew Connolly (Team CBD) collapses on the ground and I feel sorry for him as he looked shattered.....but then so did Pikey..... We just managed to stay ahead on our way to the next CP but Pikey was fading fast.....we opted to go via the track to the CP rather than down through the bush so at least Pikey could be towed.....but everything was soon a struggle and Pikey fell to the groundhe could not go on.....so we had a choice – Stop and rest for a while or call for support.....Pikey said he could not go on..... Gary cracked open the emergency phone and called HQ.....Craig Bycroft answered and was upset to hear our news as the GPS spot tracker had us in 2nd position at the time.....but we knew we did the right thing for Pikey was blue and could barely move.....something was seriously wrong.....

We trekked out about 3k to a road and we met by the "Geocentric Search and Rescue Team"they were lucky to even get to us as they had got bogged twice on the way.....the roads were boggy and slippery as the rain had been torrential at times throughout the night and had not stopped. We were taken back to Bellinghen where we had started the Trek and Pikey was taken to hospital.....he was not in a good way! Gary Paul and I stood around the fire at the TA greeting team who were just about to embark on the Trek.....they were all somewhat shocked to see us there as we had passed them earlier in the race following our very slow start....but we just smiled and gave them a few tips about the tracks ahead. Gary started toasting his Cheese and Vegemite sandwiches on the fire....and offered them around..... Paul liked the idea and they both tucked in.....I noticed at that point I had about 5 big fat leaches on my ankles.....so one of the race volunteers proceeded to burn them off with a hot stick from the fire.....yucky! So because we were out we were a bit disappointed but keen to find out the progress of other teams.....the Tri Adventure Vintage Cowgirls did not make it through the night due to bike malfunction..... however I was so excited to hear that the "Tri Adventure Apprentices" were in second when they passed through with just a bike and paddle

to go.....and later heard that they had finished 2nd. So it was not long before our support crew collected us from the TA.....we had woken them from their anticipated sleep.....like us they were a bit disappointed but in good spirits.....

Jan and her Vintage Cowgirls who had been at been at Brierfield Hall waiting for our arrival ...also came and met us at Bellingentheir team forced to withdraw when her the tubeless valve in the tyre rim would not budgedespite help from about 10 different teams all offering tools, muscle and expert opinions.



Jan also got the chance to see our Tri Adventure friend Hayley from Team "Heavily Loaded Bags" at this point and informed me that Hayley was so strong and assertive.....basically navigating and making most of the team decisions.....and that she seemed to be having a ball!

Now you would not think that things could not get any worsebut they did! At about 12pm the Race Organisers had to Stop the entire race.....as the weather was torrential, thunderstorms were battering Nambucca Heads and the surrounding areas.....and by the time we got to the campsite our tents were flooded and destroyed.....So Mountains Designs Geoquest 2011 10th Anniversary will certainly go down in history as one of the toughest and most memorable.....and Team MD's will use this experience to further improve our team so we can be at our best for XPD. Finally a special thanks to our support crew..... Pommie Kylie and Diggy.....you all were just amazing!

Post Script:-

The decision to call off the race was certainly a wise and sensible one as the Mid NSW coast was lashed with mini tornados and flooding and Nambucca Heads was flooded, the Pacific Highway cut and many left stranded.....no doubt many of the controls from the race will have been washed awayand it may take Craig and Louise from Geocentric weeks to clear the course.....

Pikey was let out of hospital after a few hours and is recovering well.....his test results from the hospital showed a Nasty Gastro bug. Pikey and Paul did get back to Melbourne despite most of the flights from the Gold Coast being grounded.....because they were on Virgin who flew under the "Volcanic Ash".....and I ended up with a gastro bug too but am now OK but a few kilo's lighter.....and Gary is back at work doing his irrigation stuff.....as the weather is perfect in Qld.

Team Designs – our next in places rather be!



Mountain Ready for Adventure you would