



Geoquest 2013 – Race report

by Outer Edge Racing (Notes) on Monday, June 17, 2013 at 2:44pm

Well, here's our take on Geoquest 2013. Congratulations to Crag and Louise for the smoothest race yet. If only they'd move it a little further south...

enjoy the report.

Geoquest 2013

We had no navigator, no support crew, one missing teammate, an almost non-existent training regime leading up to the race. Sean's only exercise in the past 4 months had been eating donuts and walking to the photocopyer. Geoquest was upon us.

With the usual mix of arse and class we herded a motley crew of Sarah, my 69 year old dad and my wife – due to deliver a baby in 2 weeks... or less, as our support crew. We convinced the highlyesteemed Pete Marshman to join the race crew and, after minimal fuss we bundled ourselves into the car and headed north to Harrington – dad's burgeoning car and trailer overloaded with bikes, kayaks, flippers, lycra and arse-lube. The kayaks were of particular concern. They were held to the car with a few pieces of old wood, screwed together that morning – the setup looked anything but convincing. Dad – the dodgiest man to have ever wielded a hammer – assured me it would be fine for the 1500 odd kms they had to travel.

After the usual pre-race preparation of drilling holes in kayaks, replacing vital bike bits and eating copious amounts of food, we were ready. Race day dawned with high cloud, hardly a breath of wind and a good forecast. As we lined up for the le-monde start I felt relaxed and calm – I was ready to suffer.

The gun went off the sprinting started. Outer Edge Racing were straight to the front of the pack leading the field down the hill with Macpac hot on our heels. After a glorious 200m we took a wrong turn (Macpac satisfyingly in tow) and relegated ourselves to the middle of the pack. We arrived at the boats, donned gear and began the dreaded ocean kayak.

Sean and I were terrified of this leg. Two years ago we had capsized a thousand times in 20kms in open water – the leg taking us hours longer than it should have. We quickly settled in to a slow but steady rhythm. Way through we were yet to go for a swim, and though the swell was turbulent, we were feeling OK. But no sooner had I congratulated Sean on negotiating another wobble, we both went swimming. And so began the next 70 minutes of agonisingly wet and slow progress. We later found out that several boats had seen sharks in the water. Had we known we would probably have been acrying mess. We capsized twice more into the shark-infested waters before land was in sight.

Somehow we managed to surf a wave into shore perfectly, and made a dash for the transition. To this day I will never know how we managed to finish so elegantly. Now that that leg was over, we could concentrate on racing rather than surviving. Staying in our wet clothing we strapped fins and life jackets to our packs and began the next leg – the run of chafe! We ran through the first short section of navigation without dramas, then headed through bushland to a 500m swim. After collecting the next checkpoint we began a tough slog up the 500m high North Brother. 5:40 hours into the race we topped out, clipped a checkpoint and began the run down into Laurieton. All leg we had been overtaking teams and we were feeling good.

From Laurieton we had a fairly uneventful paddle through Watson Taylors Lake picking up several cheap checkpoints before paddling up the Camden Haven River to Rossglen for the next run. We were greeted by our now growing support crew. Pete's parents had turned up taking the total number of supporters to 6.5. Larissa, Pete's wife had also joined the ranks from the start with their one-year-old – Haydon – in tow.

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We had been getting our mojo back after an appalling first leg and were setting times in the top 10, even though running and especially paddling were our weakest legs. After 8:50 hours of racing we set off for perhaps the toughest leg of the race. Starting in daylight was a fantastic start. With salty chafed testicles protesting, we climbed 260m to checkpoint 8 then started the Rogaine section of the leg. We picked up checkpoint D without any issues, then bombed off the backside of the peak to pick up the main road. In typical (Craig) Bycroft style the race covered an area where the maps and the terrain didn't quite tell the same story. Thanks to loggers many moons ago, a series of overgrown tracks wrapped themselves around the ridges and mountain tops, leaving would-be navigators floundering. Was this the right track? It didn't look like it... With me on the maps we wallowed for 15 minutes looking for possible tracks. Feeling exasperated, we then ditched them in favour of Pete's suggestion: "Let's head that way, I think I saw someone earlier and now I can't – maybe they're on a road". To any seasoned navigator, postulations like that would be fraught. But to us it was our best option, and it worked a charm. Back on track we picked up checkpoint E and headed for M: tactical error. As we circled round anti-clockwise slowly picking up checkpoints we found ourselves diving down a steep ravine looking for K. Luckily Renwick was on the ball and now in control of the maps, but it was a long diversion and our progress slowed even more.

To compound our slow pace, my feed had developed an odd pain at the base of the 5th tarsal – (the middle outside of the foot). The pain was sporadic but agonising. I'd never felt anything like it before – the leading theory of its aetiology was that the kayak footrests had somehow caused my feet to bend in odd and now very painful ways. When we would usually be running, we were now dordling with me limping along behind. And so it was that a 16km trek turned into 18kms and almost 6 hours! As we limped slowly into transition I prayed to the pain gods that my feet wouldn't feel like this on the bike. If they did it was probably going to be race over for Outer Edge Racing.

Luckily my bike shoes were far kinder to my feet and the pain subsided. My concentration returning we changed into bike gear and began a 50km bike. Feeling relieved we made fairly easy work of the bike leg. Sean was evidently feeling his three-month taper, though in typical style didn't complain once. The last trek had been tough for both of us and sapped a bit more juice than it should have. We arrived at Swan Crossing at around 4am. Our support crew were in form and on fire. Sandwiches were ready, boats had been fixed (not ours it turned out), chaffing cream was at the ready. Even at 4am they were perky, full of praise and ready to nudge us along with some stern, cajoling words and a little smooch for those of us lucky enough to have our wives supporting us.

The 3rd trekking leg – Leg 6 – was to be the toughest of them all for me. My feet ached mercilessly and trying to run had me wincing, groaning and carrying on endlessly. Renwick had been in good form so took the maps as dawn approached. We chugged along a road then dived down a small fire trail. From there we headed down a steep sided mountain for the river and hopeful checkpoint. We were to descend 50m apparently before finding a saddle. After 50m came and went we were still descending with only a fleeting protest from Pete and I. Sean protests at nothing, you could tell he had to carry 20 bricks for the race and he'd just do it with a smile on his dial. After 150m Renwick started to swear:

"Fuck Fuck Fuck", "Fucking stupid Andrew", "Fooooorrrk!" pause "Fuuuuuck!"

I was a bit too tired to be too concerned – so was everyone else. What's more it's not the mistake but the solution that really mattered now. It turned out that we had headed east down toward a river when we should have headed west. With a wry smile, we assured Renwick that yes, it was a pretty good balls up, but that at least we knew roughly where we were and we'd get to the next checkpoint eventually.

Two hours and two kilometres later the four of us were in la la land. We'd descended into some sort of prehistoric wilderness, which had probably never seen humankind before. A steeply dropping river, strewn with giant boulders, vines – and for all we knew, a troll or two – led us up to our checkpoint. Not knowing how far down the river we had ended up, we didn't know how far upstream we had to go. The sense of urgency was replaced by a sense of wonder. We weren't racing anymore, as the sun shone down and we worked our way through the caves and bridges of an endless boulder field and rapids, our sense of adventure overtook us. We no longer went the way of least resistance – what was the point? This 'navigational adventure' was surely endless and removed us from any sort of respectable placing in Geoquest. But it was the happiest the four of us had been all race. We chatted like schoolboys:

"lets go through there"

“look at that!”

“Wow, check out that cave – that’sawesome”

“Can you get through there?”

We even took our shoes off to cross the river on several occasions. And then, all of a sudden the river had changed directions and we were on top of checkpoint 18. We slowly began to switch on –but gave up all hope of a top 10 finish. We met briefly with team 24 (Bec, Ray, Steve and John). Turns out Bec Wilson (the pinup girl of Adventure Racing – See Rogue Adventures site) knew Sean. A hilarious interaction ensued where Bec dived in for a greeting kiss on the cheek, while Sean shot out his hand for a firm manly shake while calling her “Missy”. Somehow she landed puckered lips on muddy, sweaty stubble and Sean went instantly quiet. The remaining lads of Outer Edge Racing were slack-jawed, wide-eyed and stunned that the most haggard-looking man of the entire race scored a kiss from the supermodel of Geoquest, despite trying to punch her in the guts with a wayward handshake. Unfortunately they powered ahead of us on foot, leaving us for dead in the undergrowth. The jog/shuffle into the next checkpoint was slow and ‘uncomfortable’. Sean and I especially were feeling the last 28 hours of racing.

Comboyne is a lovely little town. As we neared the transition area we saw long time rivals the The BMX Bandits leaving. In the sun, surrounded by clean, smiling friends and family with all the food we could possibly want, it was a struggle to get up chase them down. And it showed. Our transition time was almost 30 minutes!!! On the bike things started to feel better. I could sense the end was near. Sean too was feeling more comfortable on the bike. Renwick was no slouch on two wheels, and for all I know, Pete – or Marshdude as he was now known – was born on a bike. He was the undoubted freak of the team. On his 11 year-old 18 speed bike made of leather, cast iron and stone – he left us for dead on the hills. As the race drew to a rapid end, I learned that Pete’s brother turned down an offer to represent the Australian mountain biking team, and Pete – though he never said as much – was not far behind.

The leg went quickly. Determination had returned and I was feeling fast and decisive. We powered through leg 7, satisfyingly overtaking the Bandits who had shot past a checkpoint. Later on we passed team 24 and several other teams we had been exchanging waves with. We set the fastest time of the field for leg 7, which was a great relief if nothing else. Coming into Lansdowne State forest we pulled in to leg 8 – a short split leg/rogaine. After some brief negotiating we decided that Sean and I would get the closer checkpoint and Marshdude and Renwick would get the other three. They set off at a blistering pace. Sean and I dodged as fast as our aching feet and legs would allow us. 50 minutes later the four of us were back ready to jump on the bikes. We had again set a blistering time, beating almost every other team in the field.

We transitioned slower than we should have before setting off on the last bike. Maps in hand, and still feeling resolved to smash the final few sections of the race for all it was worth, we pounded out the final 18kms only a few minutes slower than the fastest team. We had well and truly found our racing mojo again, and even though we thought we were a fair way behind the lead teams, we were gunning for the finish line. Some decisive navigating saw us negotiating some map vs reality discrepancies before we pulled in to Coopernook for the final leg.

Our dear little support crew was full of gusto. Perhaps spurred on by our sudden form, perhaps by the impending end, they shoved a sandwich in our mouth then set us off for the final fling – a 13km paddle via checkpoint 30. It was dark and navigation would be a little tedious, but Marshdude had just had a redbull and was paddling like a man possessed. I sat back and concentrated on getting our bearing right as the other two called for Marshdude to slow his maniacal pace. We worked our way down the Lansdowne River and then the widening Manning River, picking up checkpoint 30 on our way to the finish line. We set a much faster pace than we thought, and ended up at Harrington just after 9pm. We had been racing for just over 37 hours without reprieve. We finished in 7th, 15 minutes behind the 2nd mens team.

We hugged our support crew, high fived the organisers, chatted about the next race and went to bed.

Races like this simply aren’t possible without a support crew. Cath, Sarah, Wes, Larrissa, Rob and Jane were pivotal. Their smiles and words of support at the end of a leg become the reason for racing when things get tough. More than anyone except maybe your race mates (though that’s a tough contest) it’s your support crew that you feel indebted to, bound to and in love with. Without their hard work – it simply can’t be done. Thanks guys.

Sponsors too make the whole process somuch easier. Several companies deserve special mention. Hammer Nutrition fortheir nutrition and clothing (especially bib knicks and vanilla, banana andespresso gels), Silva for their hands–down brilliant compasses, Suunto fortheir very reliable barometers/watches and compasses, icebreaker for the mostcomfortable clothing worth racing in (except for the fore mentioned knicks),Salomon for what have long been the racing shoes of choice, Petzl for their head torches (especially thenao which is the business), Sea to Summit for stellar paddling gear anddry–bags, and of Moxie – who also kindly sponsored the race. To our namesake –Outer Edge (Magazine) – we are especially thankful for their ongoing support.

There are some great photos here:

<http://www.trackmelive.com.au/live/geoquest13/photos.html>

<http://www.fotografija.com.au/gallery/Mountain-Designs-GeoQuest-2013/G0000v6Xbc.24WqY/>

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