

Team Topgear Cycles

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MOUNTAIN DESIGNS GEOQUEST ADVENTURE RACE 2013

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TEAM TOPGEAR CYCLES RACE REPORT by Angus Rodwell



Angus, Karina, Brendan and Paul

It all sounded like a great Queens birthday long weekend challenge to compete in Australia's Premier Adventure Race when Paul pitched the idea to me. A few weeks before the race however, two



None of us sink with life vests on.

questions still puzzled me. "Can you really race non-stop for 48hrs without sleep?" and "how long before we'd begin battling with the dreaded Sleepmonsters?". These questions stuck unnervingly in the back of my mind as the team travelled the 1200kms together from Melbourne to Harrington NSW (Just below Port Macquarie) by car to reach the start line.

Our team consisted of three Warrandyte residents, Paul Gruber, Karina Vitiritti and myself, along with Brendan Hills (a previous racing partner of Paul's). We were joined in Harrington by a gun support crew of fellow adventurers - Philippa Birch and Gary Angee. We would all join forces to take on the "Geo". My teammates had between them Adventure Racing experience in various locations across Australia and overseas. This race was to be my introduction to the sport. Nothing like jumping in the deep end, eh? What was I doing here? I may have been low on race experience, but I made up for it by conducted many hours of YouTube research. It made me confident that if nothing else, I knew previous races inside out, what teams we needed to beat, and I could talk the talk. So I felt a degree of comfort as we walked into the Geoquest HQ to register and do competency checks.



Kayak drop off - pre race



Setting up the kayaks

The excitement levels inside the Harrington Hotel built as Craig started the pre race briefing and handed out the maps. Into the evening, we highlighted tracks and possible routes, measured distances and applied contact to protect the maps from water. We finished by packing our copious quantities of energy bars, gels and powders supplied by our very generous sponsor Topgear Cycles.

With only several hours before the starter's gun we settled in for our last sleep of the weekend before an early rise.

We woke to a dark drizzling Saturday morning. It didn't wipe the grin off my face though. Race day had finally arrived!!!



Race start - Crowdy Head lighthouse

Stage 1- 16km Ocean paddle. After a quick run from the start at Crowdy Heads lighthouse to get our hearts racing we started paddling from headland to headland off the coast in some large and tricky swells. Whilst others battled with capsizes and the cold, Team Topgear Cycles stayed upright (just) and reached the safety of the beach. So far so good!!

Stage 2 – 19km Trek with a 500m Swim in the middle. “Look after your feet “ my YouTube research had told me so many times, so keeping nice dry shoes and socks was a priority. But after only 3km of trekking the lovely coastal tracks turned to knee deep swamps which lasted several kilometres. All I could think of

was the horror stories I had heard about severe blisters!! After a freezing cold mid hike large tidal river crossing, we battled barbed wire and leach filled swamps , then scaled a small mountain before we descended quickly back to sea level ready for another kayak.



Start of stage 2 trek around Diamond Head

Stage 3 – 16km Upstream River paddle. Setting off at Laurieton against the tide and over the mud flats we paddled our arms off and zigzagging across the map locating our checkpoints before finally arriving just after dusk at Ross Glen.



Kayaking upstream to Ross Glen

Stage 4 – 15km Trek. After changing into warm dry clothes but wet shoes we quickly devoured a banana roll and some raisin bread. Eager to warm up we then set off into the night with back packs and head torches for a hilly 15km. After 6 hours of hill climbing and bush bashing through vines and over waterfalls without a break (do we ever get a break??) we arrived at transition to our support crews gourmet feast of braised chicken, vegies and rice and some very nice strong coffee.

Stage 5 – 50km MTB ride. It was midnight by now and we were still all going strong with no talk of sleep. (Although admittedly it had very briefly crossed my mind!!) The night ride started badly, with our control card left at the transition which was back on top of the hill we had just descended. We lost a few places, so put down the hammer to recover the lost time. The ride was full of big steep hills and deep creek crossings, lots of mud and many over grown tracks that were not even rideable (affectionately know as “hike-a-bike” sections) . As dawn finally arrived we cruised into our next transition at a popular campground to the sound of a snoring tent city and timing our run beautifully for our breakfast. We grabbed Weetbix, milk and banana in a snaplock bag (We were now really racing!) and more beautiful strong coffee. A quick change out of our bike shoes and into the trekking gear ready for Stage 6, only 18km long. This will be nice! Or so we thought....

Stage 6 – Trek 18km. As the sun came up, we found ourselves on riverside walking tracks that definitely hadn't had a customer in over a decade and Lantana vines that were out to trip your every move. We climbed (at times on hands and knees) up steep peaks and searched valleys for a few sneakily placed checkpoints. A navigational glitch trying to find CP18 added some extra distance, but we quickly recovered,

cracked a few jokes and after a quick blister treatment stop jogged the last 8km into Comboyne where our support crew had made fresh pikelets. What a welcome sight after a 7 hr stage in the bush!

Stage 7 – Mtb 38km. After close to 3 hrs of grinding uphill tracks we were rewarded by some spectacular views over the valley (yes we took the time for a quick photo) and breathtaking fast descents that kept the eyes wide open and the team morale high. But as the sun went down again I realised we still had 3 Stages to go. More water, bars and gels and definitely some more caffeine was required, however we wouldn't see our support crew until the start of the final stage! I'd have to dig deep now.



Comboyne transition

Stage 8 – Trek 5km. This stage sounded so easy!! A quick 5 km and we'd be back on the bike. The Stage involved splitting into pairs to test the entire team's navigation skills. All was going well until Paul and I found ourselves climbing down a steep gully over a field of fallen logging trees. After following a creek bed for some time, we then found ourselves assisting an exhausted fellow competitor who had become totally disorientated. Luckily he recovered quickly and we finished the stage together.

Stage 9 – Mtb 25km. At 930 pm we set off down the hill on our second last mission. More checkpoints, with numerous track junctions to select from and several deep creek crossings which we ended up wading across while carrying the bikes. We were getting tired but kept pushing until we finally reached the river banks for our final stage.

Stage 10 – Kayak 16km. Fuelled by yet another strong coffee (or a can of Coke in Paul's case) and geared up with bright headlights our final test was in front of us. We fought the sleepmonsters by paddling hard, splashing Karina with water, and dodging jumping fish who were dazzled by our bright headlamps. I was sure there was another team chasing us the whole way to the finish but it could well have been sleep deprived hallucinations. Either way we were not going to get passed at this late stage.



Start of last kayak

We jumped out of the kayaks, and crossed the finish line after a run down the main street with only our super dedicated sleep deprived support team cheering all the way. It was 11.40pm and no one in Harrington was still awake!!

Cheering crowd or not...What a feeling it was to cross that finish line after almost 40 hours non-stop on the go. We were so happy to finish as a team, relieved to be in 1 piece and absolutely stoked to finish over 8 hours faster than we expected. Who would have thought beforehand that we could push for so long and still be smiling and laughing all the way to the end. We ended up the 8th Premier mixed team across the line, in a strong field of experienced teams.



Happy team and crew at the finish line

A big thank you to our support crew - Philippa and Gary, Pete and the team from Topgear Cycles and of course our families and friends who had been tracking our every move from home.

Stay tuned for the next challenge..... XPD, and an exciting announcement next week!

Link to Team Topgear Cycles race video here: <https://vimeo.com/68763254>



Topgear Cycles at 05:06

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