





Racing to see as many beautiful places as I can before I die.

Tuesday, June 9, 2015

GEOQUEST 2015 - HAWKS BAY, NSW

It takes a lot to crack me, but Geoquest 48 hour adventure race succeeded. There were a few rookie errors from the start. There is no way I intended to race for 48 hours. Looking at the distances we had calculated on a 36 hour race, just in time for a steak and beer at the pub. It didn't pan out like that.

I certainly feel the race was undersold to me by team captain 'Tayles' who had done three previous editions of Geoquest. It sounded like if you could paddle a bit, run a bit and not fall off your bike you could get through the race. I'd done a few 10k hilly runs a week and a whole five kayak sessions on the serene Brisbane River. To say I was a touch underdone was an understatement.

Each Geoquest varies in the relative time spent on each discipline. On Friday we got handed the race plan and maps and there was precious little mountain biking and a lot of time on foot. Having been a runner in a previous life, I relied on muscle memory to get me through, but there is no substitute for time on your feet, even if it's just hiking. I also made the mistake of panic-buying new shoes before the race thinking my Nike Pegasus wouldn't handle the rugged trails. Yes, I gave thanks for my extra-grippy and water-resistant Salomons when we were scurrying over rock cliffs and through mud puddles, but for running on firetrails they were too stiff to be comfortable and after the 24k rogain my Achilles and my right knee were on fire and my feet felt like they had been crushed.

Ticking boxes from the start, it was also my first ocean kayak experience. With blue skies to start the race it was quite exciting punching through the waves to reach the water. But despite seeing dolphins and rainbows at the beginning, things soon changed to a vicious 3m swell around the point. My co-paddler, Andy C, issued instructions with calmness so I thought the conditions were fairly normal. It wasn't until we reached shore that he confessed there were quite a few nervous moments. Not as nervous as our members in the other kayak, Andy M and Tayles, who ended up upside-down in the huge waves. Quote of the weekend went to the volunteer at the first checkpoint:

Volunteer: "Are you having a good time so far?"

Andy M: "No, not really"

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About Me



[e Jodie Willett](#)

I'm a athlete who is passionate about pushing herself as far as her body and mind will allow. Juggling a business and a daughter as a single parent just adds to the excitement!

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Volunteer: "Oh well, it could be worse. You could be that guy whose bag was floating around the ocean"

Andy M: "I AM THAT GUY"



How not to start a kayak leg: upside down boats are bad

Fighting the cold was a constant battle, so having all Andy M's clothes soaked due to a dodgy boat hatch and 'no-so-dry' dry-bag was suboptimal. Luckily we had a long beach run ahead to warm us up. The clothing I brought was perfect for the conditions with a couple of light long sleeve thermal tops, Liv cycling vest, arm warmers, undershirts, beanie and rain jacket. A late purchase of some 2XU tri shorts was essential for forest toilet stops without the need to completely undress that comes with wearing bib-nicks.

As long as we kept moving I was pretty comfortable, however we were guilty of stopping too long in transitions when we should have grabbed and run. The winning team were fed on burgers and pizza and foods that could be consumed while moving. Spaghetti Bolognese, while delicious, was less portable. The length of the race meant we weren't working at maximum intensity so I went with some low GI foods like peanut butter and honey sandwiches and salty crackers with some medjool dates and Shotz gels to perk me up if the blood sugar was bottoming out. Instant coffee meant a lowering of my usual standards but it was purely about caffeine delivery for the night stages.

There were some spectacular moments on the first day. Clambering along rugged coastal cliffs while coasteering then coming upon sand dunes at Anna Bay complete with camels which could have seen us in a Saharan desert race. It would have been worth attaching a Go Pro to my backpack to capture some amazing scenery. The late addition of the snorkelling leg I thought was going to be an absolute chore, turned out to be one of the most fun. While not tropical, the conditions were sunny and looking for checkpoints underwater was a great way to see the fish and coral and make a mental note to come back to that spot for a summer holiday. As a tourist advertisement for the area, Geoquest was a massive success.

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I'd definitely come back here...in summer

Less successful was our rafting leg. Originally a body boarding stage, the organisers switched to inflatable craft a week before the race due to safety concerns. Crews had to leave racers uninflated craft of choice in the transition zone along with a pump. Andy C had managed to secure a raft which allegedly was fit for 4 people. Perhaps the two adults and two small children pictured on the front of the box may have comfortably traveled in it, but our whole team plus packs required a version of twister just to all get in and resulted in a lot of paddling in circles with the toy oars. Trying several different combinations led to the two rowing members kneeling in a manner similar to the stress-positions they use to torture inmates at Guantanamo Bay.

Arriving cold and frustrated into transition we were greeted with the joyous news that the race-provided canoes that were to be used during the river crossing had not been delivered and competitors would be required to swim the 50 metres across. Given that we would be hitting the crossing at 10:30pm and the ambient was around 8 degrees this posed a problem. For an hour of hiking I wondered if this was the leg which would bring me unstuck. Could I voluntarily get in water that cold for the sake of a race in which we were coming last?

So that's how the four of us ended up naked on the bank of a river in the freezing dark putting our gear in garbage bags to keep it dry. I approached it like ripping off a Bandaid – just get in quick get it done and deal with the pain later. It was compounded by the fact that we weren't even sure where we were able to get out on the other side so just aimed for a large tree we thought we could climb out on. I started paddling briskly as I entered the icy water, one arm holding my gear on top of the water, the other engaged in a sort of side-stroke. Halfway across the frigid water started to slow everything down and I wondered when they found my nude corpse clutching a garbage bag of perfectly good clothes, whether the coroner would be able to piece together the circumstances of my demise. Finally reaching the other side, climbing through some mangroves and up onto the bank we all descended into fits of laughter. Did that just happen? Did we really just do that? I felt oddly revitalised and even warm once clothes had been donned and we were back on our way.



A photo of me with camels because I'm not posting one of me swimming naked

The lack of sleep and long hike took its toll on Andy M and at 19 hours we made the decision to leave him with the support crew at the transition and continue as an unranked team of 3. Placing was not a priority at that point and at least we could finish the race. Pushing the kayaks out onto the river I was looking forward to seeing the sun rise on the water. The Lakes region did not disappoint with the first rays hitting a thick layer of mist on the water's surface. It was fairy-tale stuff. Opting for some rented double kayaks and skirts it was surprisingly warm until we were required to land on an island and run up to the top of a hill to look for a checkpoint. The two night river kayaks were some of my favourite legs of the race – so peaceful, just the stars and the soft splashing of paddles.

Having done a 24 hour MTB I knew the energy restoring effects of sunrise and felt pretty good for the next leg where we were finally on the bike. I'd had a couple of micro-sleeps while paddling but was sure the trail action would keep me awake. On paper it looked like a fairly straight forward 57km ride and after driving it for the first hour and a half and knocking of 30ks we were hopeful of getting through it quickly. The next 90 mins only chewed up 10k though as we rode up a rocky water course and negotiated long fireroad climbs that were too muddy to ride. Fatigue was setting in, we were having silly crashes and one of the bikes suffered a snapped rear derailleur cable.

I've suffered through some tough MTB races but there was always the reward of a great view or fun singletrack descent. There was nothing rewarding about this pointless foray through the bush and I was pretty jack of the whole thing by then. We arrived at the start of the next rogaining leg in the afternoon with the second night looming and an estimated 12 hours of hiking, paddling and riding left to reach the end. I just couldn't face another night without sleep and it wasn't something I had expected to do. Completely cool with being wet, nude, sore and lost and it wasn't that the legs were empty as we were the second fastest team overall on the MTB stage. Two nights of sleep deprivation is just not something that I could get through and I couldn't think of a good enough reason to keep going given we were out of the running to even get recognition of finishing as a complete team.

Unfortunately there is no option of continuing as a two-person team due to safety rules set by the organisers. We called our support team to pick us up and grabbed 30 minutes sleep by the fire while we waited for them. I felt terrible for Andy C and Tayles for bringing a premature end to their adventure. I've run through a dozen scenarios wondering if there was anything which could have got me through that patch. Maybe a short sleep? Can of Coke? Foot massage? It's misleading to look back and think there was something left to give, when at the time you're just out of answers. I also found it disconcerting watching

your team members deteriorate, hurt themselves due to extreme fatigue and struggle to string a sentence together at times. Looking at my teammates, they were in quite a state (as was I) but I knew they wouldn't stop if I didn't and I wasn't sure if I was OK with that. Geoquest was a very strange experience in that way. We really must look insane to other people!

Would I do it again? Absolutely. But I would train my arse off, especially for long distance running component. If you're cool with sleep deprivation, go ahead and amble through Geoquest and enjoy the journey. If not then go hard and get it done so you can spend Sunday night celebrating.

Massive thanks to our incredible support crew Tanya and Rob. It was such a relief to see you guys and you did an amazing job anticipating everything we could conceivably want. Support crew duties are an event in their own right. Also thanks to Liv for my Lust 27.5 which has become my 'do everything' bike and For The Riders for preparing it for the onslaught of conditions; Ride Mechanic for the Bike Milk and Moonshine to make sure both my bike and body were free from friction; Shotz nutrition for their gels and recovery bars to keep me going; Maxxis Tyres for the Ardent Race and Ikon combination that proves itself again. And finally to my team mates. We didn't make it this time, but just taking the start line was a win. Until the next one!



Anna Bay Sand dunes - keen for some sand boarding!

Posted by [Jodie Willett](#) at 4:09 AM

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