

## Nudity Optional

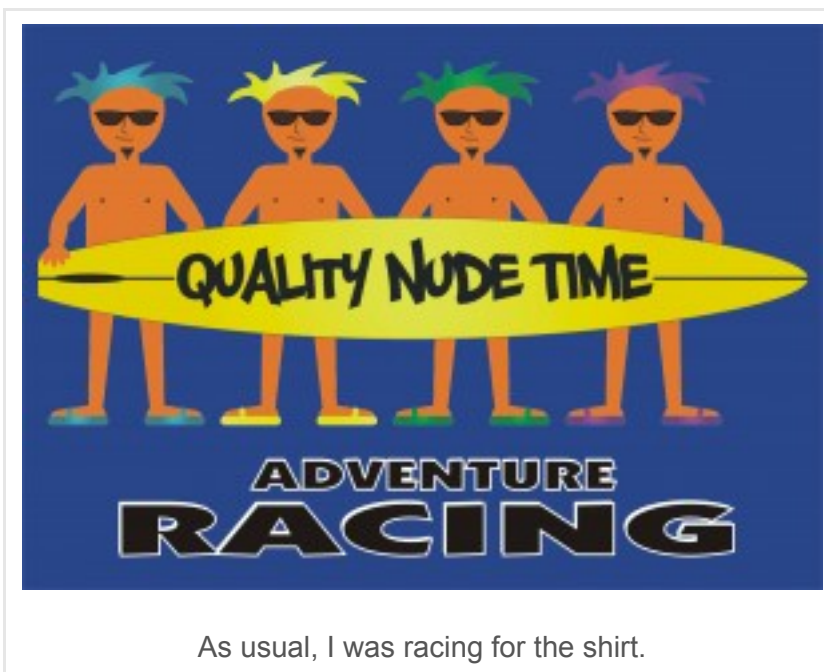
by [Liam St Pierre](#) on [JUNE 13, 2015](#) in [RACE REPORT](#)

GeoQuest is my favourite weekend of racing every year. With the [Expedition Alaska](#) start line just around the corner, a lot of my energy has been put towards preparing the gear and travel for this race, and I didn't have much time to focus on GeoQuest. I knew I didn't want to miss the race but I didn't have the time or energy to pull a Rogue team together for such a logistically intensive event.

Fortunately Leo Theoharris put me in touch with the guys from Quality Nude Time Racing who were looking for a navigator to race with this year. I recognized the names from many past GeoQuests, and the team dynamics ticked a lot of boxes for me: everything was organised in terms of support crew, gear, accommodation, etc; I would get the chance to have all the navigation to myself as practice before Exp AK; the team would probably move at a steadier pace ensuring I didn't go too far into the red before Alaska and finally Leo assured me that the team could ocean paddle – a key skill I look for in GeoQuest team mates these days. Plus who could turn up the chance to race under such a cool team name (the origins of which will remain within the team, but suffice to say I was assured that nudity was optional).

This year I was also bringing my two year old daughter to the race for the first time, and we had the rock star treatment flying in to Newcastle while Mum and Dad did the drive down with my gear to look after her while I raced. Arriving at Hawk's Nest we got our first glimpse of the QNT GeoQuest show – accommodation was palatial and had me almost regretting we had to head out to do a race. With partners and support crew we had 13 people in total staying for the race.

Friday rolled around and the pre-race checks were ticked off in freezing conditions, and it wasn't until then that I felt like I was actually going to be doing a race. Even though this was my eighth GeoQuest, it was my first chance at the real race: the kid's adventure race. It was a little worrying to see that Lyla has inherited some of her Dad's competitiveness, although she had to take a quick lesson in trusting her navigator and not just following other teams blindly.



As usual, I was racing for the shirt.



The line up for the kids race.

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Finally the course was handed out and on paper it seemed to suit us. No split navigation legs, relatively flat and a lot of paddling, all of which played in our favour. The concentration required for marking up maps always feels like sitting an exam, and it was a relief to have it done in short order with time to spare to read a few story books and get an early sleep. For those playing along, the course maps can be found [here](#) and tracking and final times can be found [here](#).

Conditions on the start line had certainly improved on the past couple of days. A smooth swell was rolling in to the beach, but looking out to Cabbage Tree Island you could see the breakers pounding off the less protected coast line. It wasn't surprising to learn then that paddle had been shortened so that teams just had to make it around the headland and into Port Stephens. We got a clean start off the beach and were with the lead pack. Conditions got tricky around the Yacaaba headland and we spent just as much time trying to dodge Jarad Kohler's boat as staying upright and moving forward. I suspected that some of the less experienced teams would have issues, and this was the case with multiple rescues. In chatting to event organiser Louise after the race, it is certainly a point of stress as an race director, however having that ocean kayak start is one of the elements that make GeoQuest so special. I know Geocentric take great care in their safety procedures, and GeoQuest represents about the only chance to experience some amazing coast line on the water, and I for one hope it remains a permanent feature of the race, despite criticism from some quarters about having it in the race. For those that don't want to ocean paddle, this element has been removed from the Geo Half.

Hitting the beach, we found ourselves in second place after a great paddle, but lost a couple of spots while the boys changed their shoes. Off for the beach run and we soon found our rhythm, ticking of CPs along the way. Running down the dunes into Fingal Spit was a personal highlight of the course. Just before, we had been passed by team Shotz, including Damon Goerke who made some comment about having arrived late for the race and missing the team meeting about who got to carry the heavy pack for the team.



An early split in the field as teams paddling the around headland.

Rolling into the first supported transition area after leg 2 with the top 5 teams, things became a little unstuck when we found our support crew hadn't arrived yet. It was a sinking feeling to watch teams arrive and leave while we could do nothing without our bikes. After a 20 minute wait, they finally arrived. Everyone was a little flustered and I felt bad for the crew as they obviously didn't want to let us down. At that point, our motto for the race is that we would have to take our bad luck with the good, and that hopefully we would be due some good luck later down the road.

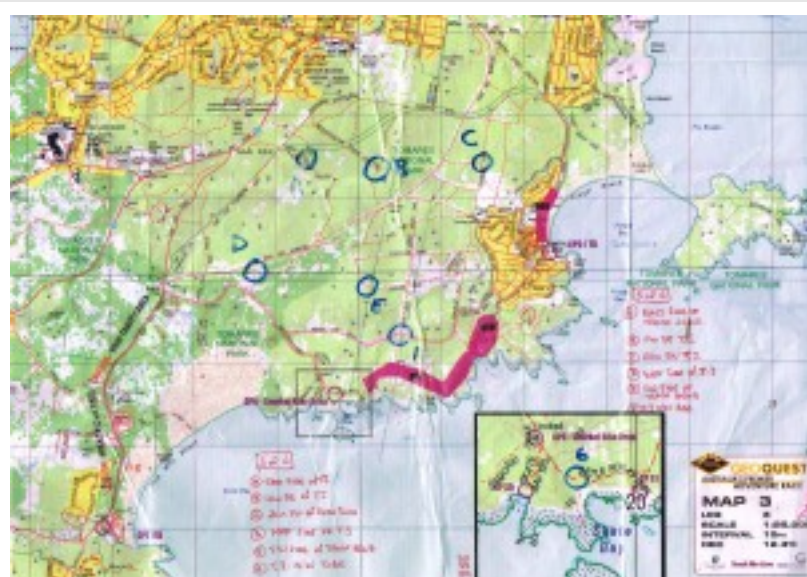
The stage 3 bike involved a 3 out of 6 CP rogaïne on the bikes before rolling into the snorkel location. I flipped and flopped on which controls to go for, eventually settling for C-B-D on the go, with CP D costing us about 5 minutes when we originally rode past it. Coming in to the snorkel location, I was again thrown off by the fact that the volunteer's car was parked within the circle of the inset and not on the location on the main map where we were told it would be in the briefing updates. Even more frustratingly, after CP S1, I forgot about the disparity and ran up the wrong track to CP S5, costing us more time. The snorkeling itself was a surprising highlight,

With the water relatively warm and plenty to see amongst the rocks. We shared the snorkel with team 19 who had a very interesting interpretation of “visiting the controls together” with two team members still on the shoreline after their team mates had already collected two of the CPs. The whole leg had not been a smooth one for us, and it was exiting the snorkeling that I resolved to pull things back together again.



The location of the snorkel in Skate Bay.

Off the bikes and back on foot and we were treated to some of the best coastering I've ever done in a race. Along with the Stockton Dunes which we also covered in this leg, this was one of the other great highlights of the race. Straight off the dunes, running the 5km along the major road to our rafts was one of the major low lights, but I can appreciate that it was probably the only way logistically possible to link the course up. For the



Map for the bike rogain and snorkel.

rafting section, I had a hold of two Alpaca packrafts that we will be using in Alaska. At over \$3000 for the pair, these boats are surprisingly efficient and light to paddle for inflatables. I knew that we could manage up to 6km/hr in them – much faster than we could carry them – so we just paddled a straight line between CPs 13 and 14 and across to the opposite bank.

Despite our early issues, we were already 3hrs up on our flight plan which meant we got to do the whole of the stage 5 paddle in the day light. With glassy conditions on the lake and paddling past islands and little towns dotted along the shore line, it was a very content time in the race. The only hiccup was when we bent the rudder of my ski on a rock paddling in to CP17. While Dean managed to bend it back into shape, it never performed properly for the rest of the race, much to the annoyance of the other pair who were trying to hold our line while sitting on our wash.



Trekking across the Stockton Dunes.

Heading into the Stage 6 rogain, we were faced with a potentially long leg. Only one route strategy seemed obvious, picking up CPs H-J-K-N-O in order and leaving the remainder for the paddle leg (although I am curious to see that Team Sholtz with the Prestons also picked up CP L on this leg). Starting out on this leg, our new goal was to make the swim at CP H in daylight, which we managed to do with about half an hour to spare. Finally, it felt like some good luck was coming our way, as it was a bitterly cold swim and I wouldn't want to have been one of the teams following to do it in the dark. CP J proved to be a little tricky, but we ticked it off with no issues, the

same with CP K. After experience the bush bash in to CP J, I decided to change our route to CP N from going cross country to hiking in on the trail network on the north which, although longer, should have been much quicker. Unfortunately all of the tracks leading in to CP N from the north were overgrown or non-existent, and we had travelled so far north that we were just better off picking up CP O before attacking CP N from the west. At this stage we teamed up with Dynamite Adventure Racing on the hunt for CP O and N, and I got a chance to chat to Sakkie about past GodZone races and how his mates would go with Expedition Africa which was just starting at the same time.



Map for the first trek rogaine.

After a short portage it was back onto the skis for a paddle down to Karuah. Finding the pull out points to collect the remaining CPs wasn't as hard as I feared it would be. Indeed, at the first exit we could see steam billowing out of a camp shower. By the time we made it up the bank, a little Japanese man had popped out in his undies for a quick lively chat. He didn't seem to mind us passing directly through his campervan site, but told us just don't wake him up on the way back through. I don't think he fully appreciated what I meant when I said another 60 boats would be coming through that night.

Every time we got back to our boats we would see those of Dynamite Adventure and Mountain Designs (MDs) pulled up on the shore, so I knew that the chasers couldn't be too far behind us. Coming off the paddle we had our slowest transition yet at over 30 mins, spending time to get warm and fed knowing that we had up to 15 hours of racing ahead of us before we saw a supported TA again. Leaving on the bikes, I wasn't sure of our placing still. The first part of the ride was cold and fast, but things eventually slowed down on route to CP23 where the hills finally started to kick up and the mud set in. Approaching CP23, the guys kept questioning if we were going the right direction as there were no tyre marks in the mud. As best as I



GeoQuest Course Overview.

could tell we were on the right track and going the shortest way there with the least elevation, even if the track conditions weren't great. In the end we nailed all the CPs on this leg directly, so the lead teams must have taken a different route at times. Many of the tracks we planned to take to CP25 on Goodwins trail were missing, but we quickly compensated for that and hit the punch just as it was getting light. Paul doing a spectacular superman dive over his handle bars when he put a stick through his front wheel was the only other highlight from this leg.

Again, luck was on our side with day break bringing some very helpful sun to light the final trek rogaine. It was a little disconcerting that team Shotz had been out for 4.5 hours on a 10km trek and hadn't returned yet, so we were expecting a long leg. MDs also rolled into transition just as we were leaving. We ticked off controls in a clockwise direction V-W-U-T. Dropping of the ridge from CP W, I couldn't locate the marked track until we were well below it's highest point. Instead of heading back up and around we just continued to bash out to the main road. Just as we were heading

In to CP U, we came across MDs who had just collected it after a little difficulty and they warned us it was well out of the circle. The plan was to play it safe anyway and just head up the creek it was marked on, but I was pretty surprised to find it hung on the intersection with the main creek line about 400m east of the centre of the circle. Again, luck was in our favour. Given how far east of the CP circle we were, we trekked back out and around on Skyd Hill Road to CP T. On the final



Map for the trek rogaine.

hike back to the TA we started to come across some other teams – the first we had seen other than MDs in a long time – and stopped to give the Tiger guys a heads up on the inconsistency with CP U and some of the other missing tracks.

A quick look at the map for the next bike leg and it was a relief to see the riding was either downhill or flat on good roads. Again, MDs entered the TA just as we were leaving. The whole time I just assumed they would pass us once they got their rhythm going as they are a naturally faster team. It was on this ride though that I thought we should at least give a dig at trying to hold onto our fourth place overall and



Riding in to the finish line.

if we did get passed then at least we wouldn't have any regrets about not trying. With the team working together to draft and tow, we cranked it into the transition where we managed to get onto the boats without seeing MDs come in. Too afraid to let the foot off the gas, we hammered the 25km paddle out in 2:23, pausing only to flip the maps.

At the final TA we got a number of mixed reports on how far our lead was. It wasn't until we clipped the final CP with just a 12km flat ride home that I felt we had it in the bag. Needless to say, crossing the line as the winning men's team and fourth overall was a very satisfying feeling.

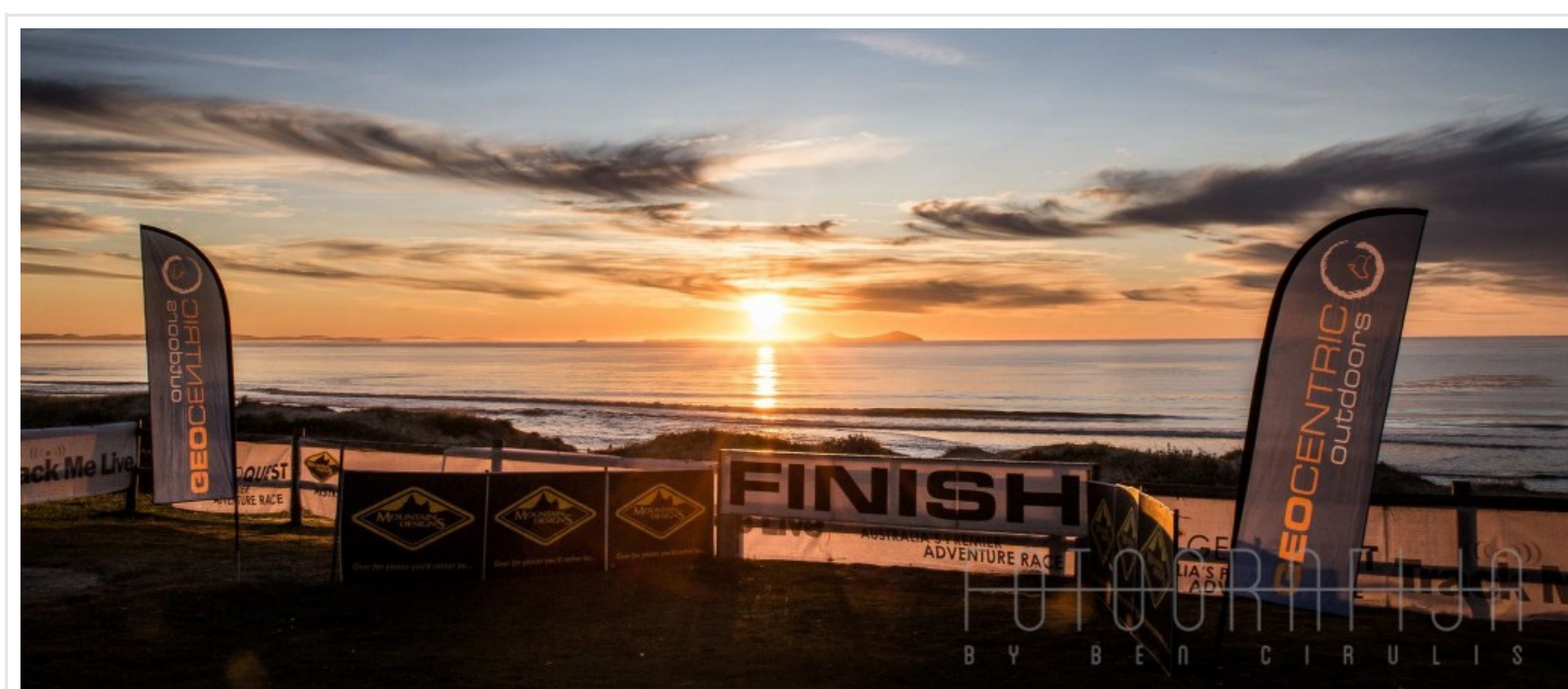
In reflection, I have a lot to take out of this race. A big thank you to Dean, Wayne and Paul for inviting me to race with them. An even bigger thank you to their support crew who really put on a show – definitely transition areas with style and all the modern comforts. Going in to GeoQuest as training for Expedition Alaska meant that the fitness was there, which helped with concentration on the navigation. After almost 10 years of doing GeoQuest, the team as a whole were over



QNT and their fantastic crew

the moon to finish in day light on the second day for the first time ever, which helps so much with the recovery and clean up. Depending on where I'm at with racing and training, I'd love the chance to race with the Quality Nude Time guys and their awesome Geo bandwagon again in the future. Plus I still don't feel like I've had a

chance to see their nudity policy exploited to its full potential.



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