

This Rambling Rover

Taking on the adventure of life...



GeoQuest 2017

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ON JUNE 17, 2017 / BY THISRAMBLINGROVER

Alex: “oh god, it says there’ll be 50-100mm of rain tomorrow”

Heather: “What does that mean?”

Pete: “It means there’ll be a lot of water”

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After leaving rainy Sydney for a rainy 7hr drive up the coast Team Rover Scouts arrived in rainy Sawtell, just South of Coffs Harbour, which I’m sure was also very wet. See the trend?

We spent the day sorting through our race tubs, making sure we had what we needed, and showing our support team what each item was for. We were far more organised this year having all this and meal prep (thankyou support team) finished before the race briefing, meaning we could properly focus on marking up maps once we got them. Organisers revealed the paddle legs for the half course were cancelled due to flood warnings. The full course still had an ocean paddle start but all following paddle legs were also cancelled. This was disappointing but completely necessary from a safety perspective. If I’ve learnt anything from writing risk assessments over the years, it’s that sometimes you just need to call it.



In hindsight, I'm grateful we didn't paddle; check out these epic images from the Full Course start on an ocean kayak leg.



This year was so different. We felt confident and excited as a team, rather than nervous and anxious. We all agreed on wanting a f**ked-up-hardcore-blistered-aching adventure race, and were ready to be uncomfortable to smash it out in less than 24hrs; and that's exactly what we did.



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8am Saturday morning we made our way from the shelter to the rainy start line. Race organiser Craig counted down from 10 and we were off the line with 32 other half course teams. We jogged along the beach, pacing ourselves for the 13km of sand running ahead. Shortly we reached the much anticipated “swim” which turned out to be a chest deep wade through surprisingly warm water. Holding packs above our heads we made the crossing and continued running, not much wetter than before since it was raining so heavily. Our only rule for this race was “don’t stop moving” so while burning from a long jog on sloped sand we alternated between two minutes of running and 30 seconds of walking which worked well in holding our place in the race.

At 10:30am we reached the first Transition Area (TA), greeted by our support team who had our bikes ready to go. We took a few minutes to rinse the sand

from our shoes and were off on our 38km bike leg, preparing ourselves for the 1000m elevation we were about to climb.

As usual it took me a while to find the strength in my riding legs, but once we got momentum this improved. We were playing leap frog with other teams who were stronger hill climbers. To make up for this we became fast downhill riders to catch up. Ross's navigation was a clear advantage for us, opting to take different slightly longer roads to avoid hills, and often catching up or getting ahead of our passing teams.

While competitive, adventure racing is still such a friendly sport. Every racer who breezed past as I struggled up a hill or even pushed my bike shouted encouragement as they passed “almost there”, “keep pushing”, “you got this”. You are all champions, thank you!

With so much water around we were riding through calf deep river crossings, boggy puddles and slippery clay slopes. We were covered head to toe in mud and couldn't be happier as we yelped and yipped our way through the course. The climb up the mountain to the telephone tower quietened us a little as we pushed our bikes, and then walked them back down the other side. Steep slopes on technical tracks became unrideable as the clay turned to mud.

Holding onto our bikes to stay upright we slid down the path and into our next transition area.

Having not seen any teams in a while that alone feeling of “are we last?” had started to creep in, but seeing our excited support team we were encouraged to hear we'd made good time and we were leading the back pack with multiple teams still to come through. Quickly dropping muddy bikes, picking up lights and food we marked out our Rogaine and set off again on foot with an hour of daylight left.

At 4pm we jogged it out, (2mins on, 30sec off) to put some distance between us and tailing teams. It was an epic start to the 16km Rogaine trek leg. Crossing

cattle grids, we jogged past a cow, who then started to follow. Nervously we picked up the pace (how fast can cows even run?) and so did the cow who then crossed the road behind us and up the bank to her calf. Thank god.

While climbing another 1000m elevation towards the phone tower we clued onto some unmarked single tracks that zig zagged up the steep slippery slope which saved us a fair bit of mud and effort. A gamble that paid off. The three check points were spread out, and Ross continued to wow us as he predicted every river or hill around every bend.

As we got further into the leg the slopes got even slipperier and steeper. At times, it was easier to sit and slide through the clay, and it was of course hilarious as we all fell over. A group of 3 teams caught up and we all supported each other and chatted as we slipped out of control down the mountain. We again gambled on zig zagged single trails which put us ahead, and we ran it back across the flat to the next transition making the most of sealed road.

At the TA we gave archery a very sad attempt in the dark, taking 25 rounds to hit five arrows in the target. We had quick hot soups, admired our clean bikes (thankyou support team) and enjoyed the comforts of machine washed and dried bike shorts.

At 10:30pm we started the 20km bike leg, spoilt with sealed roads most of the way as we detoured from the originally planned kayak. The rain pelted even harder making it challenging to see past bike lights while leaning sideways to keep out of my own tire slick. Twice I found myself with one eye forced shut full of mud, but at least being so wet I only needed to look upwards in the rain to wash it out. Brakes on all our bikes are now squeaky and only half working, making this leg a fast one as we avoided our dodgy brakes. The rest of this leg was a blur, visibility was poor but we were running off adrenaline as we rode through the sand and into the transition to start our final leg.

At 12:45am after a fast turnaround in the TA we were off, again running to the

beach for the final 13km to the finish line. Acknowledging how tired we were, and how much our knees and calves were hurting we decided to set a strong pace and walk out this section. Up the beach the wind was howling and the rain just kept on falling. Pacing into the dark we all went into silence for a few hours, and then realised how much we needed to talk just to stay awake.

Eventually we came to the final swim, the fast-moving river crossing that swept out to sea. Doing this in the dark had me scared. We went upstream, linked arms and entered the water. Soon enough we were chest deep, drifting down and then scrambling out on the other side. It all happened so fast, but we were now 600m from the finish.

For our final push Tristan was freezing, we were all stiff and it took some serious convincing to get the team to run it out. Only managing one minute running to one minute walking we made it up the ramp to the surf Lifesaving Club, held hands and crossed the finish line at 3:24am, 19.5hrs after starting.

We were STOKED. Our goal had always been to finish in 24hrs, and then once the course was shortened we wanted to do it in less.

Compared to last years' experience finishing in 36hrs due to injury, it's been an unbelievable turn around and so, so rewarding to be competitive. The team this year stayed so focused, communicating everything we needed and felt, knowing exactly what our next navigational moves were, preparing for transitions and pushing through to keep moving nonstop. I could not be happier, thank you guys for a f**cked-up-hardcore-blistered-aching time.



This race couldn't go ahead without a handful of friends coming along to watch our tracker move, and wait in the rain for us to reach transitions. Support Crew do so much more than just cheering us on (though that was nice). You guys were our rock, you had everything ready for our next legs, food, bikes, gear, hot drinks etc. Plus preparing all our food while we marked up maps. I cannot thank you enough for your time, and unlimited support in the lead up and during the race. You guys are amazing xx



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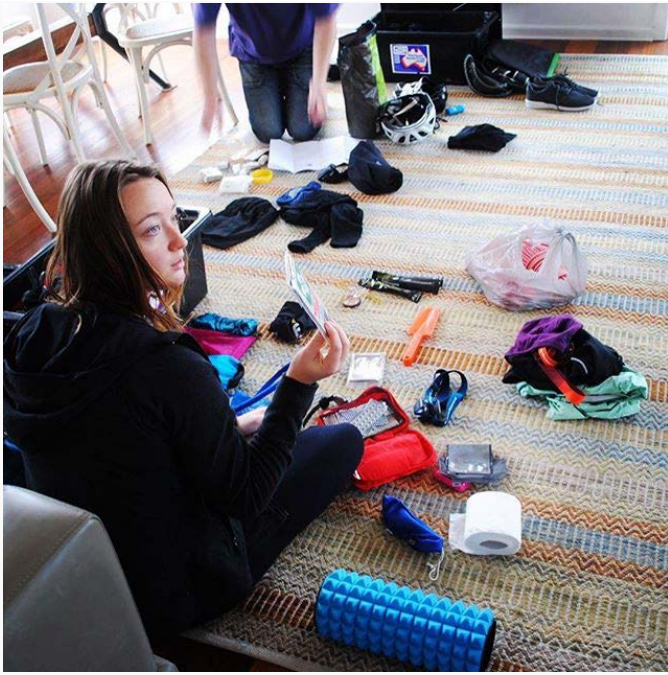
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