

# Geoquest 2017 – Sawtell, NSW – 10/11 June

Saturday 6am and I am awoken to the sounds of very heavy rain outside the bedroom window of the accommodation my team and I are staying at in Sawtell. I lay there half-awake knowing that I'd soon have to get up and that I'd be facing a weekend racing in that rain. I wanted so very much to believe that I was dreaming and soon I'd wake up for real to a newly released forecast showing that the predictions for extreme weather were all wrong and we would in fact be racing in near perfect conditions. After several minutes I realized that there was very little I could do other than accept the fact that it was about to be a very long, very wet weekend.

It didn't take long for the rest of the team to be up and about checking B.O.M on phones, reading updates from Craig on the Geocentric Facebook page and watching severe weather warnings on the morning news. With the fact that 3 legs of the course had already been dropped and the ocean paddle start was now changed to an alternative we weren't even sure if the race would get called off all together, and to be honest at that point in time I might not have been too bothered if it was.

Skipping forward a few hours and all the bikes, kit boxes and kayaks were loaded onto the support crew car and we were on our way to the new start in Coffs Harbour. With the weather and dangerous surf conditions the initial beach launch for the open ocean paddle up the coast had been cancelled and we were now looking at a 3 lap circuit inside the still very rough Coffs Harbour. The launch was mayhem, boats and racers everywhere, epic flips, plenty of rolls and it became very apparent as to why we wear helmets for ocean paddles. I was nervous when we started and I was very very cold, my nerves didn't settle but the elevated heart rate certainly did a lot for warming me up. First lap in and my foot rest in the front of the kayak that I was pressing against hard to brace as we rolled over the large swells snapped and was forced to find an alternative way to sit that would allow me to brace and prevent us from rolling over each time we went over a wave. Sitting essentially in a butterfly leg position so I could jam my knees against the internal walls of the kayak was a less than ideally comfortable position to be in but it did work. 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of a lap to go and we were flagged by the life savers telling us to head straight into shore as the rest of the paddle had been cancelled. We paddled all the way back in watching the life savers rescue 2 other teams and awkwardly tow their boats back to the beach. We had done OK, we had survived the massive swells and paddled almost the entire 3 laps, feeling good about that was shortly interrupted by getting smashed by shore breakers and completely flipped over as we came in to land. Ouch! That was painful.

Finding our other team mates and our support crew we managed to get off the beach and up to TA quickly, not bothering to change we made good time getting out onto the second leg a 13km coastal run from Coffs Harbour to Moonee Beach.

This leg was fun, we managed to run most of it, seeing some amazing coast, even in the pouring rain, several strong flowing creek crossings, a few headland walks and some rock hopping and we were at the next TA in just under 2.5hrs.

We were feeling great, had a feed, changed a few items of clothing, got on our bikes and were happy to be on the road. 19km ride from Moonee Beach to Bucca where we would have a foot rogain leg. The ride started out easy, out of town and over the highway, then a long slow climb on a road that curved up and around a hill overlooking shade clothed plantations. The rest of the ride was varying combination of bitumen, graveled forestry roads and of course fire trails that were reduced to sloppy mud (one of my least favorite surfaces to ride on/through).

I had taken us about 1.5hrs to reach the next TA and it was now around 2pm. Checked in and got our wrist bands for the 8km rogain section needing to collect 6 out of the 8 cp's on course in any order. We headed out the way we had come in looking for what should have been an easy grab off Cemetery road but we couldn't locate the gravestone, being that this was the first CP we gave it up knowing we would have to collect another one later in the course and didn't we pick a doozy to collect. We decided to drop down off a road to find cp C and had to climb over thick, messy lantana and over and under fallen trees. After struggling for quite some time we happened to stumble right onto it, then took the much easier creek walk route out to find cp D. At the end of the race we would learn that we were one of only 3 teams who managed to collect that CP!

### Check Point C!

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3.5hrs later and we were done, back at TA, the temperature was beginning to drop and knowing we had a bike leg next and the fact that the rain had stopped we decided to swap out some wet gear for some fresh dry stuff.

40km bike leg from Bucca to Boambee East which was marked as containing a large amount of elevation change and turned out to be mostly on extremely muddy churned up forest trails. Pretty sure I already mentioned that mud is one of my least favorite surfaces to ride on, I can honestly say that this race has made me a much more confident and happier rider on/through mud!

This leg was definitely epic and for most of us mere mortals rather un-ride-able at the end forcing us to walk/slide/skid our bikes down a seriously rutted, muddy and crazily steep descent into the TA, all the while watching other teams who were ahead of us coming back up the very same hill on foot. This could only mean we would also be soon suffering the same fate! Oh and the rain had once again started with renewed ferocity, thanks to our wonderful support crew who set up shelter and made us hot soups to warm us up before we headed back out into the cold.

The 19km trek leg that came next would be the longest leg of the race, starting at just before midnight and not coming into the next TA until almost 9am. This leg saw us cover over 1000mtrs elevation and decent on foot, overnight, in torrential rain, on clay/muddy paths and through creeks, over old rotten wooden bridges (I'm so glad it was dark and I didn't look down until I was over!! – it was really, really high) and finishing with a climb that got dubbed 'the stairway to heaven' (only not heaven to walk up) and a down that I secretly named 'the descent into hell'.

I was so excited to reach the next TA knowing we were only 2 legs away from finishing and finally being able to get warm and dry! But before we could continue we would have to, as a team, shoot 5 arrows in total into the target in the Archery Challenge. This didn't take us long and I very much enjoyed it as a welcome change for the mind as much as a change of muscle usage.

Again a fairly quite transition and we were off for our final ride, we knew this would only be a quick one, 22km, mainly on road and a few open fire trails, we completed this leg in 2hrs and beat our support crew to the TA. Thankfully they were only a few minutes off and pulled up just as we were taking off our bike shoes.

A single 14km beach trek to the finish with a few creek crossings and a large swim at the end and we would be home. It was just after 1130 and the rain had stopped, in fact it was getting quite warm so we decided that we would dump all excess gear other than mandatory for the final walk thinking that we would be finished before we would get cold again. The weather decided to screw with us one more time and the rain kicked in again making us wish we had some more warm stuff to chuck on. The monotony of the beach walk also didn't help making us all quite sleepy and slowed us down considerably, 2 teams overtook us as we struggled to stumble towards the finish line.

The super strong current in the final creek forced us to wake up quick smart and the minor panic at the thought of being washed out to see with the current certainly kicked up the heart rate and left us all much warmer despite being wetter than we were prior to the swim (if that was even possible!)

14:22 on Sunday afternoon and Team 13 – Eye of the Tiger Adventure stumbled and swayed our way under the finishers arch to applause from friends and locals. We cheered to our efforts with a well earned beer / cider thanks to our amazing support crew!

Wow...what a race.. Probably the toughest race I've done so far, not because of any one thing specifically but the combination of course, temperature and weather conditions.

I say that every race is a chance to learn, develop skills and grow as both an athlete and a person. This race certainly provided me that chance and I'm thankful once again for the opportunity to be a part of it.

Thank you Derek, Shane and Steve! You guys were amazing and I am so glad that I got to share this journey with you.

But the biggest thanks have to go to my wonderful Husband Trevor and my beautiful daughters, Jaimie and Tianna. I couldn't do any of this without your support, belief and encouragement.



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