

Thunderbolt Adventure Racing

MENU

Geoquest 2017 Sawtell



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The lead up to Geo 2017 was a little unusual. It had been raining pretty solidly and the forecast for the weekend was ominous with flood warnings up and down the NSW North Coast. This put the organisers in a difficult position as they knew from experience that rivers flood very quickly and this can compromise safety and rescue plans. They made an early call on Friday to remove the river paddling at the end of the race by removing three legs (two paddles and one bike leg) plus some single track MTB sections. Whilst this was disappointing for many of us, there really were no other options. What it did mean is that the pressure was taken off the Friday evening rush as we only had 8 legs to plan. This made for a more relaxing time but we still managed to

fiddle around enough to keep us busy until hitting the sack to the sound of heavy rain at about 9.30. We also got to sleep in as the ocean paddle was shortened due to heavy seas. When re arrived at the start we were also advised it would consist of a few laps of the harbour – which we all thought would be very straight forward.



Leg 1 – Coffs Harbour Kayak

The race got underway in torrential rain with a the shortened paddle and we were a little surprised as the size of the shore break and waves even inside the

harbour. Despite this we all had lots of fun in the waves, well except Josh who was extremely relieved to be back on ‘dry’ land and might have mentioned this once or a thousand times over the next few hours. We had managed to punch straight through the breakers from the start with a relatively uneventful although bumpy paddle leading the pack from the start and back onto the beach. We were a bit surprised at the carnage out there on the paddle, we saw a few capsized or sinking boats and later heard about some damaged boats and saw some spectacular photos.

Leg 2 – 13km Coastal Trek, Solitary Islands Walk

We quickly transitioned and headed out along the coast, for the most part running along the beach, crossing a few rivers and a couple of sections on a walking track. A few chasing teams caught us with a few kms to go as we overshot a turn losing a bit of ground. We surprised our support crew as we came into transition as our tracker updates were lagging behind but managed a speedy transition and headed out first on the bike.



Leg 3 – 19km Bike Bucca Forests

Little bit up little bit down mostly on 4wd tracks. Peak Adventure came past us after the first little climb as Hugh landed a flat and needed a tube in the back tyre. We later came back past them as they dealt with a broken chain.



Leg 4 – 8km Orienteering loop Bucca Forest

The rogaine loop where we needed to collect 6 of 8 CPs. We seemed to be the only team going anti-clockwise so we ran past many of the chasing teams as they headed in the other directions. We skipped the 2 checkpoints in the creek opting to get those closer to roads and judging from other teams experiences and photos this was a smart move.

Leg 5 – 40km Bike Orara Forests/ Upper Orara

Heading out on the longest bike leg of the race we saw the chase teams heading into transition knowing they would be chasing hard. Certainly a bit of

climbing on this bike leg and a good way to test our teams recovery post Expedition Africa 3 weeks prior. We lost some time at the first CP as the tracks on the ground did not fully line up with what the map said. The rain had stopped briefly making one particular section of dirt road that was messed up by logging traffic super sticky, caking our tyres in thick mud. It was almost impossible to keep the wheels turning especially as we climbed. It was like riding a fat tyre bike made from lead. We were then searching for puddles to ride through to get some of the dirt off the bikes and at least when it started raining again it helped to clean our bikes.



After Leo got distracted by big Tonka toys, it was a welcome relief hitting some bitumen for a section nearing the end of the ride. Before hitting dirt again for a final climb. The final decent into the transition was steep and slippery, slipping and sliding on or off the bike. Team Tiger Adventure had caught us towards the end of this bike leg and made a few minutes on this descent as we dealt with a broken hanger on Hugh's bike.



Leg 6 – 19km Trek Orara West/ Tuckers Nob

This leg proved to be the crux leg of the race. We set off just as darkness fell chasing hard to try to regain our lead. Our first challenge was to clamber back up the steep muddy descent we had just slipped down on the bike. We made reasonable time but Josh unfortunately rolled his ankle badly running down the next hilly section. We fed him neurofen and panadol and he tightened his laces. He didn't enjoy clambering on the bigger rocks or uneven surfaces after that but he soldiered on. We caught up to Tiger Adventure as they were searching for CP 16 and proceeded to lead them up the wrong creek searching for it ourselves. We were then both caught by Peak Adventure and BMX Bandits descending down from the CP once we had located the correct creek. We were then able to swap some stories as the four teams formed a pace line running along a track toward CP 17. Unfortunately I think we all distracted ourselves and combined with tracks that weren't marked well on maps, realized we were heading the wrong way. We all turned back and whilst Peak Adventure and ourselves stopped at the last track junction, BMX Bandits and Tiger Adventure continued all the way back down to the creek. Peak Adventure turned off the

track to the left and after some discussion and studying the map we did too. We were very happy when we saw the checkpoint not far along this track. To transition from here was another Bycroft special. A seemingly endless steep slippery ascent followed by an even longer, steeper ~~slide~~ technical descent down. The question was whether you tried to stick to the sides where there might have been some leaf matter to step on or branches to grab but more sloped if you slipped or go for the flatter ruts in the middle with less to fall but also less grip. It was always a case that it seemed better whenever you weren't. We ran pretty well down this again passing many half teams and catching Peak Adventure at the bottom as it turned into bitumen and then the transition.

Leg 7 – 22km Bike Pine Creek – Archery

Before leaving the TA we had to complete the archery challenge. Luckily Josh had done this before and shot 3 from 3, Leo managed to fluke the other 2 whilst Bern and Hugh at least learnt to shoot an arrow vaguely at the target. We left in front, ahead of Peak Adventure who looked like they might have a bit of trouble collecting their arrows. It was mostly a bitumen ride made challenging with limited visibility due to the teeming rain. A creek crossing and short ride on a beach path into the final TA we had made good time.

Leg 8 – 14km Coastal Trek

As we retraced our route out of the TA and headed towards the beach we saw team Peak Adventure in second place riding in. We estimated about 10-15min gap and knew they would be chasing hard. We were not going to be able to stroll on this last beach run. We keep checking for headlights behind us but this was difficult as we were passing Geohalf teams and we were convinced they would be chasing with headlights off behind us. There were no checkpoints on this leg just the lights of Sawtell in the distance that never seemed to be getting any closer. Through the torrential rain we eventually made the final creek

crossing. The tide was flowing quickly out and Josh was nearly swept out to sea as we swum across, landing on the not so soft oyster beds on the other side. One more km to the finish and we were finally able to celebrate a victory and defence of our title in a time of 15hours 41 minutes, in the end 35minutes ahead of second place Peak Adventure.

It was then lovely being able to enjoy (read collapse) the finish whilst cheering in Team Peak Adventure, Tiger Adventure and BMX Bandits and swap some stories with them before heading home for showers, more food and sleep, finally getting dry for the first time all day.

The course may have been shortened and altered due to some atrocious weather conditions but it was fun, fast, very wet and hurt. Everything we had expected and more. We tend not to be the fastest team, so we were pleased we had the legs to come out on top in what ended up being a fast race with few tactical options and limited opportunity to make big mistakes.

Thanks to our fabulous support crew the amazing Kim and Mike. We couldn't have done it without you and although the pace of the race meant you had very little down time you certainly enabled some very speedy transitions for us.

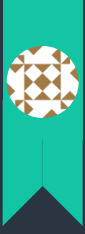
We'll see everyone next year!

We did not have many photos this year but Bern did make a little video which is on our FB page

(<https://www.facebook.com/ThunderboltAR/videos/302732646840779/>).

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