

The Barking Cog

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A different kind of Adventure- Geoquest 2017

6/14/2017

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It's been quite a while since I've put pen to paper, well two years infact! Life has changed somewhat, and these days the legs are not as fast as they used to be, but I still love to ride. Amongst other things now I've added some other sports in the mix too!

Two weeks out of geoquest team Wild and Co found themselves two men down from injury, so with a quick decision and organisation found two new recruits, one of those being me! eek!

Adventure racing is a non stop race involving navigation between multiple checkpoints composed of trail running, hiking, mountain biking, kayaking, swimming, and any other mystery discipline the organiser decides to add!

Hearing about these crazy races with some of the training groups I run and ride with recently had given me a thirst for this type of racing, no time like the present! Feeling rather out of my depth with preparation, and kit supplies, I begged and borrowed from many awesome friends, visited the Aldi ski sale to grab some thermals, and suddenly found myself well equipped for hopefully every eventuality and discipline ahead of us!

We arrived at race headquarters in Sawtell to the well promised rainy conditions after leaving clear blue sunny skies in Mooloolaba. Of course, we were back in scottish weather, 100mm of rain per day, woo hoo things were going to get soggy, or dreich as they say in the highlands!!

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Elite level road cyclist and Veterinary Surgeon.

Represented Scotland in the 2014 Commonwealth games.

Live to ride and race, always with a big smile on my face!

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With flooding of the rivers and most of the region expected there were quite a few changes to the race course. A lot of the kayaking, and single track riding had been cancelled due to flooding in river banks. The course was altered so we were left with a short ocean paddle in the morning, leading into a beach run, mountain bike, 8km rogaine, 40 km mountain bike, 20km trek, 20km mountain bike and finally a 15km beach run. Of course we were to encounter navigation, crazy terrain, darkness, rain, mud, sweat and tears... but somehow it all looked pretty straight forward on paper! We actually convinced ourselves that all of the hard riding was out of the way and as a road biker I was going to be in my element, clearly all of the bike legs were going to be bitumen and downhill...our standing joke for the race! Lets pump our tyres up and lock out our forks says Lucy with a big smile and complete naivety about what was coming our way!

The first night was spent packing boxes for transition with bags of food, clothes and all of the equipment we would need at each stage, I think I spent about two hours moving things around, asking questions and generally faffing, but finally a box was full, maps were marked and it was time to hit the hay and have one final night of warm and dry before we braved the elements!

On the morning of the race the rain was tipping down, and the waves were crashing in, surely we weren't going to have to paddle in that, oh yes were! This is an adventure race, which means anything is possible!! shivering like a banshee with butterflies of total fear were took our kayaks to shore and waited for the whistle to go.

Having never paddled out through the waves I was ready to follow any instructions my team mate Matt was going to yell at me from the front, except I didn't hear when I was supposed to jump in the boat, too late! I tried to jump in, a wave crashed over, which filled the entire boat with water, bilge pump going crazy and we had to go to shore to tip the boat up, empty out the water and try again.

Take two out we go Matt shouts jump in earlier this time, done. Wait....for the wave then paddle paddle paddle, and woo hoo we made it through the wave, massive high five and such an elation! Hard bit done!

Lukas and Chris hadn't been quite so lucky yet, we waited a few minutes and chugging along with the bilge bump working overtime to drain the water out of their boat they had made it through too, go team! We paddled our three laps round the harbour, which was so much fun in the waves, and then the last challenge was to get back through the surf again. Matt had his timing spot on and yelled when to paddle once again, and we made it safely to shore, phew! We made it out alive and completed task 1!

Some other teams were not so lucky, and the rest of the paddle for those who hadn't yet completed the distance was called off in the end, it was just too dangerous in the conditions. The scene was insane, boats vertical in the air, with the backmarker a face of terror, sinking boats full of water, and others crashing into one another from the power of the waves!

Once we'd dragged our kayaks back to shore, it was runners on and off we trotted on our beach run, one checkpoint to transition and then onto the bike, easy peasy! We set off feeling fresh and in high spirits. Running along the beautiful coastline watching the waves crashing on the shore, the sun was beginning to poke through the clouds, life was pretty good...until we realised we had made it to transition, having missed the first check point, damnit!

From here we had two options- 1) keep going and likely get a penalty of at least four, or maybe up to 6 hours on our time, or 2) run back to the checkpoint, about 10km of running on the beach and add about 2hrs to our time. There was no real question, we had to complete the course, so back we trotted, of course we had actually been right past the checkpoint on our way through and just missed it entirely! Onwards and upwards from here, that was our big mistake for the race, from here we were going to nail it!

We took off on the bikes and I set off with a big smile, bitumen, woo! Straight off uphill into some beautiful hilly terrain, we soon turned onto some fire road and weaved up and down and tore through some muddy

trails. We were making good pace and near the end of our ride as darkness was setting in we had caught up with around 5 other teams, after being last out of the first transition, happy days!

Back at transition our amazing support team were on their way back from dominoes with warm pizza ready to wave us in, they had been watching our satellite beacon, and knew we were nearly there. Until we turned down a steep muddy vertical slope... "we can't ride down that" we all said, well we just have ridden down some epic mud slides, so they must want us to have to do some hike a bike here..OK well now we had set off down this slope there was no going back up it, and therefore convinced ourselves we must be going the right way. I'm sure we could even smell that pizza from where we were.....

Anyway we kept going down hill and at the bottom there must be a road (you can convince yourself of anything when its dark and cold and you want it to be true!!) uh oh! A big stick jumped out and wiped out Matts rear derailleur, small problem! We had a spare, wrong size, so managed to make his bike into a single speed, and off we went once again. Still not going back up that hill we kept going, and finally realised there was no getting out of this road, the only way was back... I really didn't think it was possible to get back up a vertical mudslide so tried to convince my team to hike across a field of cows to the nearest road. Mmmm maybe not such a good idea either.

Vertical mudslide it was, jelly arms trying to push my bike up the hill, and thank goodness rescued by the others, we made it back to the top found the right road, and finally made it back for thrice heated dominoes pizza, which I can tell you still tasted like heaven! It was warm!! Coffee, dry clothes, all was good again.

Off we set at midnight onto our 20km trek, knowing we had to hike back up some of the trails we had just slid down, filled us with joy! Such joy, and of course it just kept going up. The rain rattled down constantly, and we were soaked to the skin, getting damper and colder, there was just no way to keep warm, and each time you gained some body heat there was another icy cold river to wade through to find a check point, brrrrrr!

This is when you rely on your team mates to tell silly stories to keep the morale going, 20km doesn't sound like too far, but in the dark in that terrain finding hidden checkpoints in the dark..., it took us 8 hours to cover that distance. It was gruelling, but also so beautiful, we passed an owl sitting on a post, and watched the moon blast out of the sky in front of us, and as the light appeared through the trees at dawn steam rising off the leaves in the trees, there certainly was a feeling of peace and contentment, not too far to go now!

The end of the hike was a leg busting descent, we picked some sort of downhill mountain bike track, that was super steep and slippery, and for some parts a bum slide was the only option!

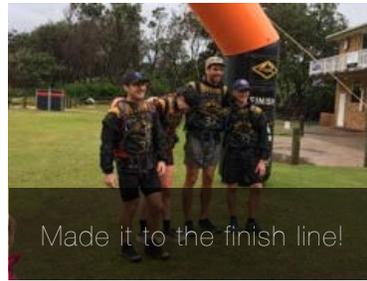
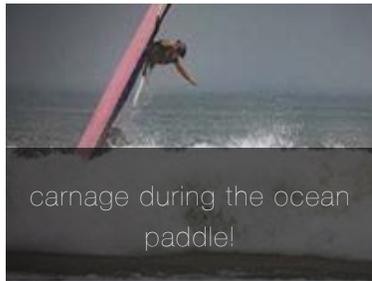
Second last transition, back on the bike, more warm food and dry clothes. This was my low point, everything was just wet, and sore, and sitting on the bike seat was like sitting on glass. Ok 20km on the bike, its bitumen and downhill, lets just get it done! Wait stop! Matts bike has given up, the super single speed, just wouldn't let him pedal, nooooooo!

In the pissing rain we stopped again and realised that it was unresurrectable, poor Matt, he had to run up all the hills, and Chris dragged him along the flats, while Lukas pushed him from behind. I navigated our limp back to the final transition, that was all the strength I could muster by that point!

The end was finally in sight, a 13km beach run we started to put one foot in front of the other and managed to break out into a ploddy run every muscle yelling and screaming at us, but somehow it was less painful and quicker at this pace than if we walked. We all said that alone we would have walked, but somehow that energy and motivation of being a team pulled us all together and we made it running all the way, we past two teams in front! We sure were the "hares" in tortoise and the hare of this adventure race! Next time we may be a little smarter....but getting lost, and the sleep monsters are all part of the adventure!

We did it, super happy and having had an absolute blast, pushing limits of fear going down crazy slippery mountain bike tracks, exertion just pushing on for hours and having belly laughs at some funny situations, I

felt exhausted but very much alive and ready for more.....of course after a warm shower and some hot food!!



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Colin Carrington

6/15/2017 09:50:28 pm

Congrats on 'doing it' and finishing despite all the obstacles your team was faced with. This was the first AR I had an interest in watching. Your written report is most informative and adds much to all the dot watching I did. Best wishes for 2018.

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