



DYNAMITE ADVENTURE RACING

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Friday, 20 June 2014

What a Cracker of a Geoquest!

This is a race report prepared by Bruce Shaw, our newest Dynamite Adventure member. He was not only a Geoquest newbie, but it was his first adventure race EVER! Great effort by him and a huge level of commitment to dive in the deep end with us with an aim to be towards the front end of the field. Well done Bruce, hopefully the first of many!

It's 4am and the Dynamite Adventure Team convoy was underway. Paul would fly a day later, whilst Karina, Gus & myself hauled our gear up the Hume to compete in the 2014 Mountain Designs Geoquest Adventure Race, all 48 hours of it!



Bruce, Karina, Paul and Angus (Photoevents)

By Friday morning the complete team had gathered for our crack at this year's Geoquest. A team of six – 4 racing and 2 supporting would soon be living out of plastic tubs and off local bakeries as we navigated our way around 250km of beach, bush and waterways on the northern NSW coast. Kelvin & Nikki, our support team, were to become the single source of everything during the race. They would feed us, help clothe us, service bikes, have our equipment ready and get us cracking out of transition as soon as possible.

A race of this size brought in teams from all over Australia and one even from New Zealand. From first timers, like me, to one bloke who'd come every year for 11 years straight to race... the field had a diverse array of teams and experience. We'd soon know which teams would be putting it on the line to win... or in our case get as high up in the top ten as we could.

At the Friday afternoon race briefing two

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"What have I done?" Bruce (Photoevents)

things stood out for me. One being the safety speech discussing the "inherent dangers" of not just adventure racing, but also the Australian bush... the sobering line was that if you're not comfortable with taking personal responsibility for the unknown dangers ahead then come and be withdrawn from the race.... hmmm. Secondly, was to do with the increasing wind levels and how that could affect the first kayaking leg – frantic research to know what the weather was doing.

I had been told that the real race starts at the briefing, 18 hours before we officially start to sweat in earnest... it wouldn't be long before I found out why.

With maps in hand, we literally had to pick the tracks & roads we would take for the entire race and there wasn't just one to choose from, plus at least 20 maps. The team poured over the course, selecting route variations, calculating distances and a running sheet of where we would be and when – it was at this stage that our bravado prompted Kelvin to blog our comments about how we would smash the course, we'd also become expert Archers in a matter of minutes!... I can honestly say that looking at the maps I was utterly naive of the story they tightly held... but that wouldn't prove to be my biggest obstacle.

False bravado for sure... little did Kelvin know just how much Paul & I were sweating on the call for the first ocean paddle leg to be jettisoned due to strong winds.

The wind built even more and via social media the organisers sent out news that the ocean kayak was abandoned and we'd now MTB from the get go... this worked much more to our strengths.

So with courses plotted and maps laminated, it was time for fine tuning gear selection. Never having done an adventure race, not even an afternoon of polite orienteering, I was in a panicked state of mimicking when it came to packing... I'd been well briefed and so didn't find myself without the right gear... socks... lots of socks and be prepared for a freezing night when paddling... this made sense... our legs would be exposed and not moving, so out came the heavy duty ant Artic expedition pants just in case.

All the gear boxes had been ticked and so at 10pm I was very surprised to be nodding off for a half decent night's sleep.

1. MTB (22km)

A quick goodbye to the support crew and we set off to find the start line. At 8am we were off at a relatively sedate pace... I'd expected some attacking on the bike but reminded myself of the length of the race.



Peleton forming shortly after the start(Photoevents)

Keen to start well and gain advantages on our team's riding strength, we found ourselves at the pointy end smiling away – 'how easy's this' I thought... then I had a moment – if Seagate* is not up here... then why on earth are we? (*Seagate being the number 2 ranked team in the world for adventure racing)It wasn't going to take long before I could demonstrate just how green I was to the sport of adventure racing.

Our first mistake was we had failed to transfer the additional map information during route planning and found ourselves to be the only ones traveling on the track known as "poor track". Turns out it wasn't too poor and there were only three or four small sections that we couldn't ride due to the sand. We met peak adventure where the tracks met so figured we hadn't lost too much time. We then turned right to go across the bridge through the back of the caravan park and then onto the beach with the bikes which wasted some extra time that we were about to need.

2. Split rogaine trek and swim (8km)

Off the bike and into the first trek leg I should have drunk literally litres more fluid than I had done, plus spoken up about the pace being just a tad hot. But I didn't, we were racing and my theory was to tough it out. Big, big rookie mistake.



Karina trekking around Hat Head (Photoevents)

It must be said however, that this first trek couldn't have been in a more beautiful place. Rough coastal tracks took us along brutal cliff tops and sandy bays surrounding by steep ravines. Maybe less time on the view and more on the fluids next race.

We'd hit the first TA in 4th place, but by the time we left had dropped down to 14th... in part because I had punched the checkpoint stamp in the wrong box at CP F and we had to go back for it. At least Karina and Paul got to have a rest!?!)

3. MTB (22km)

Time to hammer on the bike. The best part of this leg was the massive push Kelvin gave me as I left transition. I couldn't move up to Gus' back wheel, the team kept slowing but it was not good. This next section of riding would be dramatic in time loss. The first half was ok, sandy, tricky and generally ok, I just couldn't go as fast as I needed to. Karina took some weight out of my pack – now 2 kilos lighter... but no faster. Next up on the track, a massive sand dune. I paused at the bottom thinking that the moon seemed closer and more achievable. Gus took Karina's bike & Karina took mine... my first thought was what do I lean on now – I thought my donuts were dusted? I got to the top. I don't know. The team must have wondered what an earth was going on and what would they do with just 3 functioning racers. Next up was Paul who pushed me up the last hill to end of the ride.

I can't explain how we moved up to 10th during this section, the exhaustion must have been shared around.

I lay down next to the car, utterly spent and thinking I'd really made a complete mess of the race, but around me the team worked frantically. Hydralyte in a rather large dosage was downed. I tried eating, but chilli tuna wasn't going to sit well – so next effort was a vegemite roll. It would take two hours to eat that vegemite roll.

4. Trek (11km)

And then we were on our feet again and moving.... moving was the key. Waiting was the race now, waiting to come good. 30 minutes later and at last I could crack a joke... nervous laughter... has he lost his mind or is he coming good the others probably thought? Perhaps a bit of both?

One team after another went past us. What is normal practice, but does look a tad harsh, is the use of a tow rope between two people and when one racer went past with one attached to their waist... it seemed to be getting dragged against their will... I thought thank goodness we hadn't carried one of those on this leg or I would surely have been hooked up!

Thanks goes to the team for giving me the highly valued currency of time to come good without too much pressure to speed up... in the rainforest we were surrounded by soft, moist soil... perhaps they were looking for somewhere to bury me? I really wouldn't have minded so much. But I kept thinking who's going to paddle with Paul?

Eventually, the walking pace quickened and then we broke into a stunted jog. Just over an hour had past by the time we passed a team stopped on the track with one guy horizontal and their captain on the phone... they were pulling the pin... I'm not sure what the problem was, but extremely happy to have the team experience to identify the problem and being given the opportunity to settle back into the rhythm of our race.

The course took us north along another coastal track with incredible views before rounding the headland and dropping down onto the beach for a few km's along the sand to the the TA and our support crew.

We had dropped several places and would start the next section in 13th.

3pm and we had hot food washed down with copious amounts of hydrolyte. Our next rendezvous would be roughly midnight and we had to be self-sufficient with a heap of gear and food until then.

5. Orienteering relay (5km)

The orienteering section was relatively easy going. The guys got Karina to fetch the longest (and turns out wettest) CP as she had been strongest all day! This was an untidy and slow transition, especially given the time the orienteering section gave us, but with extra heavy rafting packs on we took off out of town.

6. MTB and rafting (30km)

A key part of this section was rafting. We would have to carry the two rafts and associated gear for all of the riding... which would be ok for an hour, but we found it soon wears you down (aside from killing your back).

A rather unique local had decided jumping out a people from tall grass pretending to be a barking down as they are riding at 30+ km/h with huge packs on would be amusing just before the rafting. After copping an earfull from us hopefully they thought about it a little.

We did however seem to have a great rafting leg. Karina glammed it up on the second boat as she held onto the bikes, making sure they didn't fall onto any oyster beds. Gus had a crippling bout of

leg cramps when he walked into the river for our raft launch and almost went under. We had an efficient start, fine tuning our paddling technique in what is essentially a kid's toy. Deflate, repack and get moving as the sun came down. We moved into 12th. Crossing before dark was a big help to enable identification of the exit point and navigating a river lined with oyster farms - we were starting to drag ourselves back into the game.

One left turn onto a dirt road and we headed skywards... or at least that's how it felt and then just had to keep grinding out the km's in the now dark cool evening. Steep descents on fire trails were kinda tricky with all the pack weight trying to keep you from slowing down and then throw in a front light that shakes loose to leave you in pitch darkness for good measure.

Eventually we made the checkpoint and started out on what would be something I could never have appreciated if I wasn't there. The time was now 6pm and had been dark for an hour.

7. Rogaine (8km)

With wet feet from rafting, we plunged on foot into the dense rainforest looking for a dry creek bed... good lord! Paul took the lead as head navigator and we followed his head torch as he smashed his way through all manner of forest debris. Using our map, minor clues and the landscape, Team Dynamite literally fought through all manner of terrain, with Gus & Karina also sharing the load for navigating. The second CP was overshoot a little, but the others we found ok (with V being the CP dropped). Our next 5 hours were filled with laughter, confusion, and determination, slipping and sliding as we worked our way through the checklist of points. Eventually we'd return to the checkpoint and our bikes at 10.47pm in 8th place. Which would explain all the bikes lying around as other teams grappled with the night.

8. MTB (17km)

Back on with the raft packs and down to the river. Sadly, that's not how it happened.

It's a little blurry still, but I can just remember the sensation of going up. I went into counting mode. Only to six, I didn't want to tax myself unnecessarily. Every now and then we had to hike the bikes, but overall we were making ground. The steep lumps that were washouts on fire roads became near impossible ramps. The best part of it was we were doing it together, we talked it up when we could, grouped up at the top of hills and became a single unit even without thinking about it.

9. Kayak and portage (10km)

12.24 am and we'd made it back to the support team in 7th place. Time on the river was up next, and out came the surf skis for the first time. The paddle leg had some dry land to negotiate in the middle and we had spent considerable time researching the fastest way to portage our boats.... Gus had devised a cunning plan. Run!

We paddled with Cyclezone Maloolabah and caught another team at the portage. The kayaks are heavy at the best of times, but at 1am they'd weigh a tonne. We had wheels... serious, professional wheels that meant we could run/tow through the portage. This is probably a moment in time when you get an insight into what the race means to the team and the effort that would be required to shave minutes off where we could in a 48 hour race. Gus & Paul would prove immense in this short portage. Nice work.

2.08 am. 5th place. An incredible effort. Blow the siren!

10. MTB (45km)

We'd been briefed that the next section of the race would see us away from our support team for 12 hours, this meant 2pm the next day for reloading on food and water. I loaded up with 5.5 litres of water, several vegemite rolls and all sorts of small snack foods... plus spare socks. Off we rolled on the bikes, very happy not to have the rafts. The temperature had dropped to roughly 5 degrees and I could literally hear Gus shivering... my expedition pants would have been looking pretty good at that stage. It took a while to process that the shivering meant he was extremely cold, so we stopped and pulled out warm head gear and kept going, the best way to warm up was to keep moving... a punishing theory...

I think we knew we were in 5th and so kept the power down. My problems from the start of the day were pretty much gone and it was automatic mode when on the bike. Soon enough and we had to make decisions about our route choice. Take the shorter distance via steep hills and keep warm or head along a valley in what would have been extremely cold but easier riding conditions. We took to the hills and then we took to the no-doze.

Our next checkpoint would prove to be incredibly difficult to locate. Travelling down several offshoot tracks looking for it but coming to dead ends wasn't as bad as I thought, just turnaround and pedal back up. I think we must have been in a trance. Elusive as this checkpoint was, we had to find it. Karina was starting to feel very tired, but a 2 minute lie down recharged the batteries, especially when we told her she'd been sleeping for an hour!

Gus & Paul were looking for a way through from our track's end to the 'must be there' road on the map, only a hundred meters away or so. We decided to bash our way through. Our first obstacle would be crossing a creek with steep banks and infamous lantana weeds and all manner of vines that grew way over our heads. Unfortunately on the other side, the foliage was thicker and no road could be found. We spent the next hour working our way up and down that creek, splodging through waist deep stagnate water. Keeping our bikes out of the water was tough when you're legs are clambering over hidden logs, but at least it was light now.

Another team came down the jungle creek from the other direction and then another, all carrying their bikes. The scenario really seemed to be a comedy sketch in the making. Eventually we made our way up and out to the checkpoint with some relief, but we'd dropped back to 9th.

11. Rogaine (9km)

Onwards to the Archery range, Karina & Paul made short work of hitting the target while Gus & I

were a tad off, firing Arrows into the quarry behind, thanks Paul for getting those. One more trek and I felt like we would be on the home stretch, but water was becoming an issue. At some stage Gus would discover that his 2 litre bladder was empty. Four more checkpoints hidden in creek beds and hill tops would take us on a real test of determination. I wasn't much help here in navigating, as per the night before, the other 3 took turns to search and lead through the overgrown bush. Sharing the water around, we opted for safety in route selection, keeping to tracks as much as we could.

12. MTB/raft (29km)

We'd dropped back to 11th, with several teams' only minutes just ahead. A quick redistribution of our remaining water and we got going. The time was now 12.45pm.

Riding out we again anticipated an early descent from the hills, but this was also not to be. In many ways it worked to our advantage as Karina smashed the hills leaving one team we passed to comment 'where do you find a girl like that?'. Before making the next transition we had to raft across another river, which was short and sweet with our rafts being dropped off at start of the crossing. We met SA ambulance at the river crossing. A quick inflate, paddle then deflate and we were hot on their heels again on the way into town.

Luckily we would just have to carry the rafts another 10km or so to the next transition. Whilst feeling utterly buggered, the wind was at our backs and a sense of 'what the hell am I doing' whilst clambering through vines in the middle of the night had well passed. Up into 8th after a strong section through the hills, we were coming home with a wet sail.

13. Kayak (15km)

Our support crew was incredible. We rolled in to find coffee, chocolate muffins and all sorts of treats laid out for our speedy consumption. The boats were by the water ready to go and our paddling gear was out. With at least 3 different types of food in my mouth we started the last kayaking leg at 3pm. The headwind wasn't as bad as I expected and the incoming tide wouldn't affect us. Unlike in training, Paul & I were able to get to the front and set the pace for a while. Mid paddle was a weir wall to portage, which meant exciting the water up a steep rocky section.



Paul and Bruce back on the water after the portage (Photoevents)

The body was really feeling it now, at least the sun was keeping us warm. All of a sudden we sighted team SA Ambulance just ahead, we'd been racing them all day and night. Gus' competitive streak kicked in and he was soon powering past Paul & I to catch up to them, which we only just did as we hit the TA.

From the paddle into our last transition and it was my turn to get the shakes and shivers. We'd moved up to 7th overall with Team Rogue accidentally taking a wrong turn at the start of the

paddle and continuing upstream for 1 hour until they came across teams rafting.

14. Coastal trek (11km)

Gearing up for the final run at 4.38pm we knew the sun would be setting in minutes. We had to find the last checkpoint before dark. The team took off and the pace built, it was a pace I really didn't feel like I had, but with not a lot of options 'suck it up' was the only way forward.

Hitting the beach in fading light, I was trying so hard to be of use finding the last checkpoint, but was being more of a tourist than a helper. Checkpoint found and then off for a sandy run home.

Trying to stay in 4wd tracks on the sand, to limit the sinking, was difficult as they were only wide enough for one foot. Then behind us we saw lights us, racer's lights. It was time to turn ours off and make sure they didn't know where we were.



Along the road before the sand dunes and beach trek (Photoevents)

Lights off was a great decision, not only did it reveal the surf, amazing array of stars, a building storm above Crescent Head, but it took away the need to watch where each step was going and made me at least stop thinking about the sand. We were all experiencing different levels of exhaustion/pain. It's hard to all shuffle at the same pace, when everyone's bottom gear is at different speeds. We each continuously switched between walking and running in an effort to keep together.

We didn't know it, but SA Ambulance had their lights off and were only a few hundred metres away. In the end they finished 3 minutes faster after almost 35 hours. Through town to the finish line... it would soon be over. Nikki & Kelvin met us with beer & champagne! Paul did a little jig, whereas I was just happy to be standing up! In fact, when we grouped together arm in arm for a photo, it was the most stable I had felt for some time. How did we end up? 6th in the premier mixed category and 7th overall. It was really a phenomenal result given all we encountered so the guys were stoked. The team managed to stay smart enough and fast enough for long enough.



The Finish line (Photoevents)

We'd finished the race, but the race wasn't finished with me just yet. Hobbling back to the house with beer and laughter going hand in hand I couldn't wait to get warm. By the time I was in the bathroom trying to get undressed, my ability to move was quickly seeping away. I made it into the shower, sandy gear strewn all over the place and just sucked up the warmth, I couldn't wash myself, and I could only stand there. Gus yelled out – Are you ok? 'Just' I replied. I thought I was using all the hot water, so turned off the shower... then starting getting cold... on came the shower again to warm up. Eventually I made it the 5 five feet to my bed and covered myself with a sleeping bag and down jacket, turned onto my side and lay there motionless, every time I went to move I started shaking.

The team went out for a celebratory dinner, but I literally couldn't get out of bed, even though I desperately wanted to share in this last part of the adventure together. By morning I'd recovered enough to walk to breakfast with the team. I really can't thank them enough for bringing me on board, especially such an unknown quantity. The race was undoubtedly tough for me, but in the end I loved it. I have to thank my family for all of their support as well - Sarah, Grace & Mac were incredibly excited when I got home and had spent much of the weekend posting well wishes and tracking team Dynamite... sometimes wondering why the little line was going around in circles! It takes a few days to digest exactly you have accomplished. The more that you share the experience with others in many ways the prouder you become. Listening to yourself talk about what you went through as a team, the situations that we found ourselves in and just the notion that we didn't stop creates a distracting backdrop in your mind. All of a sudden and the discussions have turned to ...what next?

Bruce, although pretty shattered had finished his first adventure race and passed our "test" with flying colours and only one lost toenail.

A few more lessons to take home in "reading instructions and map notes" thoroughly, being more efficient in transitions and more uncomfortable on course, never giving up and support crews are priceless!

A big thank you must go out to our support crew (they didn't falter), families (for putting up with our time away training and racing) and kwik kopy braeside (for printing our stickers) as well as our local bike shops (DCM cycles and TopGear Cycles)

Posted by [Dynamite Adventure](#) at 14:10



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