

## XPD ~ WHERE LESS IS MORE

By Samantha Gash | September 22, 2015 | Blog | No Comments

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### *Have Less, Think Simply And Embrace The Unknown*

Over the past few years I have been less motivated by racing and more drawn to endurance pursuits that focus on the journey in between the start and finish. I know that racing inherently has its own degree of ‘adventure’ – such as the uncertainty in how things may turn out and the terrain you can cover, which is particularly special in trail races. However, there is something from my approach to racing that separates me from that adventurous mindset. My focus becomes tunnel vision, I am less likely to look around at my surroundings and appreciate the remoteness of where I am and I feel an increased degree of certainty in my forward motion as I am on a marked course and I know where the definitive end is.



Racing Sam at GOW

In 2010 I raced in Antarctica, undeniably an incredible place that is so unique from anything I had experienced. During the boat ride through the Drakes Passage I was pinching myself that I had just turned 26 and was so fortunate to be going to Antarctica. Yet, as the race started, my objective to race hard

prevailed over much of my awareness or appreciation for the location. My eyes became locked onto the snow underfoot and I took on the mentality of a track runner as the course was looped.

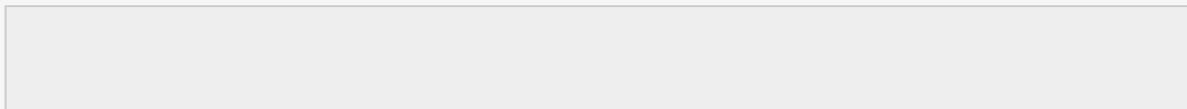
I look back at photos of this race and kick myself that I didn't look around more and soak everything in. Fortunately there was one moment when the give-way to penguins rule meant I had to stop for a pair of penguins that were passing on the race path. My first reaction by having to stop was one of annoyance as I was on the hunt for the competitor ahead of me but quickly I laughed in amazement that there was such an occasion to give-way to a penguin.



Head down whilst racing in Antarctica... Photo credit: Dean Leslie

Due to this personal reflection of WHY I DO WHAT I DO and definitely due to my experience in the Kimberley 100km race, where a bushfire caused serious injury to several competitors including Kate Sanderson and Turia Pitt, I have shifted my focus away from racing and onto self devised expeditions.

Taking on these challenges, where for the most part I create the parameters of when to start, when to stop, where to go and why I am doing it has been incredibly liberating. It doesn't mean I don't appreciate when I do decide to race but I have gotten back to the essence of why I like to run.

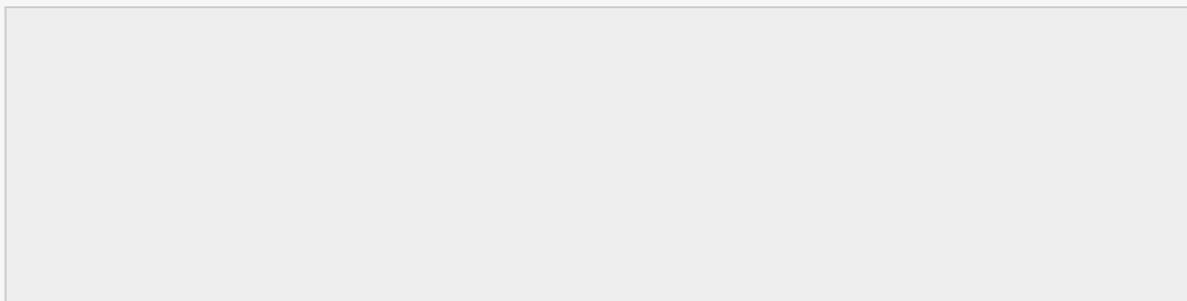




mmmmyes so liberating to make our way through bamboo and tall grass!

So with all that in mind, when I was asked last December if I would be keen on tackling Australia's own expedition length adventure race, my tummy filled with butterflies with how I would endure up to 9 days of MTB riding, kayaking and trekking on minimal sleep. Although it was a race, it was prefaced with the word 'adventure' and my potential team seemed more excited about embracing that component than the time it would take to finish.

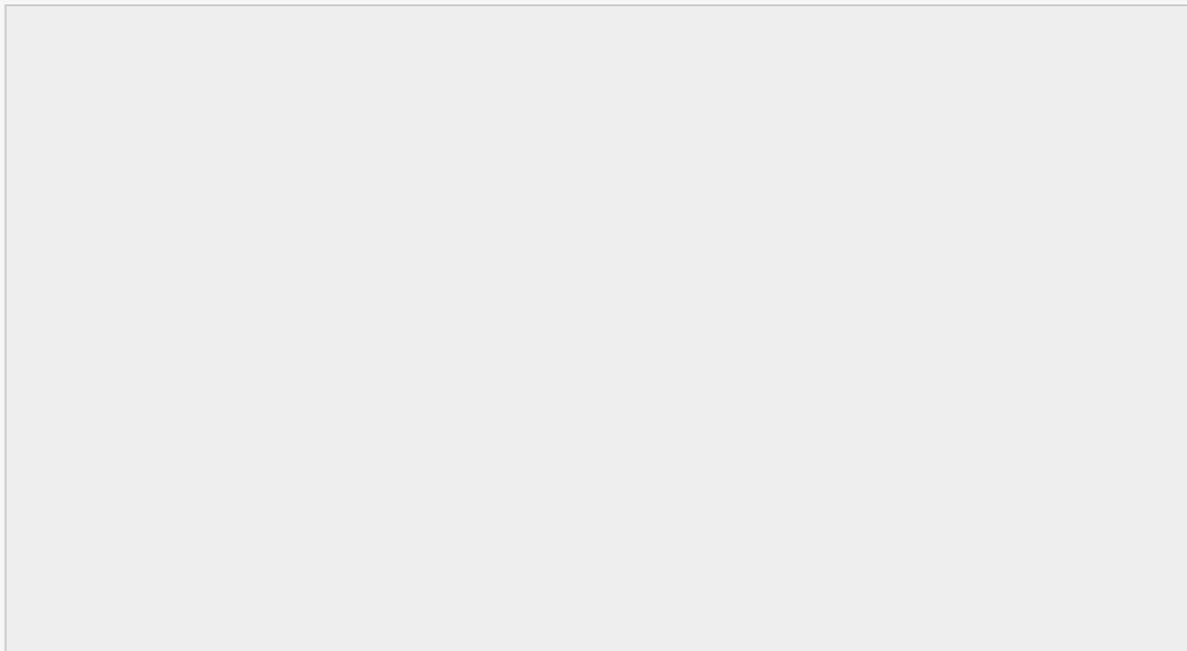
It took me less than a couple of weeks to commit to a team that would include 3x novice XPD participants (myself, Andy and Jroddy) and 2 time XPD(er) Leggy. I had been convinced that my mental aptitude and experience with endurance would be strong enough to override my complete inexperience with MTB riding and kayaking. I somewhat doubted that position and was filled with nerves on whether I would be able to handle this challenge up to the time we reached the start line.





5 days in and about to head off on the longest MTB leg.

7.5 days after the race began my team cycled into the race finish. Having virtually worn the same clothes for the duration of the event we were smelly beyond belief, deliriously fatigued from the mere 12 – 15 hours we slept and ecstatic that we surpassed our goal of finishing the approx. 700km course well under the 9.5 day cut off.

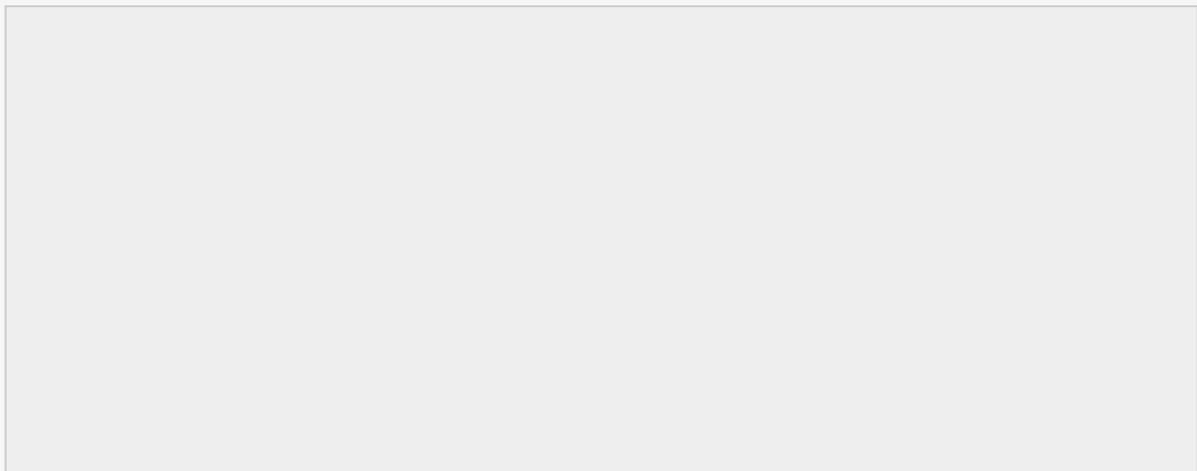




Team 2XUDASHArea51 at the finishline

I started writing this blog by going through a day-by-day breakdown on what we experienced. And whilst that could make for an epic storyline for a movie it is also feels right to leave the blow-by-blow details into the memories of the four people who experienced it. I will also save you from having to read an even longer blog.

*“The Very Basic Core Of A Man’s Living Spirit Is His Passion For Adventure. The Joy Of Life Comes From Our Encounters With New Experiences, And Hence There Is No Greater Joy Than To Have An Endlessly Changing Horizon, For Each Day To Have A New And Different Sun.”* Christopher McCandless





Imagine that jump for a sub 5 foot individual...

The simplicity and as my friend Jan put it 'singularity of thought' is what still stands out for me after 6 weeks of being back home. For that entire week our team of four were on the same page in movement, objective and conversation. Although there were times when we were fighting sleep demons that made you feel on the edge of death or enduring physical challenges such as jumping between large rocks or walking through dense forest that scrapped your arms and legs, the experience was incredibly peaceful and relaxing.

At the core of what we were doing was moving under the sun and stars for 20 hours a day for a touch over a week. The rest of the time was spent in transitions prepping our gear for the next leg, eating or attempting to get some sleep in our inadequate bivvy bags. I would say none of my sleep was 'quality' and the location of where we chose to kip would range from the verandah of a post office, in a rain forest under sticks and rocks, in a dry river bed where the ground was bone chilling cold and in a chair by a fire after paddling for 70kms straight.

So often people lock their minds into the hardship whilst they are experiencing challenge and then find enjoyment and appreciation upon reflection when it is all said and done. We made a pact with each other that we wouldn't forget that we chose to take on this adventure and we needed to appreciate and embrace, in the moment, this week of disconnection where we had the liberty to think of little else than our

surroundings and what we were doing. It was an adventure that occupied our minds in the months leading up to it and took us away from our loved ones back home. None of us wanted to have regrets that we didn't make the most of it!



That moment just before the sun came up on the last day

I think most people would expect team dynamics to play a crucial role in how the experience would fold out. Now completing XPD, I put team dynamics as the number one component with navigation skills closely behind. I'm super relieved that the three guys in my team had an approach that was light and inclusive. For most of the race we were on our own, but every now and then we would come across other teams and the occasional bickering and grumbles were heard as people began to fatigue and mistakes were made. Our team was not exempt from making navigation errors or poor decisions (especially with when to take sleep), however our team accepted the fall out of those errors with no hysterics and minimal frustration. I did happen to be with three guys who have an obsession with animals so there was one 8km navigation error that allowed the boys to catch a baby crocodile – which brought childlike happiness to them.



Mr Snakeman with his baby croc

Once again XPD reminded me of the power of the sunlight. As it faded each night we knew the coming hours would be increasingly challenging and our fatigue would heighten. In contrast, in our darkest and coldest of moments just before the sun came up, we comforted ourselves with the knowledge that we would feel instantly better once that line of sun would enter the horizon.

The race is well and truly over now.... however, my desire for more experiences in remote environments and opportunities for disconnection of the multitude and focus on the singular has increased.



*'Be Content With What You Have; Rejoice In The Way Things Are. When You Realize There Is Nothing Lacking, The Whole World Belongs To You.'*

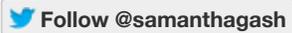
Lao Tzu

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NEW B L O G XPD ~ where less is more  
"The very basic core of a man's living spirit is  
his passion for... <http://t.co/c2efllXgrK>

This girl... AH-mazing!! ❤️❤️ My sister  
finished her first 100km race over the  
weekend (in 13hours 33 mins) AND she...  
<http://t.co/umgCPcmLBG>

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