

XPD "as much an expedition as a race"

August 2004 at Broken Hill

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Do you enjoy the 5km Traralgon Harriers run? So do I. Looking for something more? A half marathon, a marathon, a triathlon, an ironman. A multisport race like the Blue Rock Classic or the Mars Challenge? Don't hold yourself back, go for the five to ten day adventure race.

What is it? Surely it can't take that long?

Well the XPD is a teams race of four people and our team, Mawson, comprising Glenn Richardson (Hazelwood Nth), Adrian Keogh (Puckapunyal), Leigh Privett (Albury) and myself, finished the race in 7th place in 7 days, 6 hours, 6 mins, 30 secs. The first team took 5 days 2 hours, the 17th and final team to finish, took 9 days 9 hours. This is an expedition. What were we doing for more than a week? Well the one discipline, sleep, was the thing we did least of compared to mountain biking, trekking and kayaking. We had about 11 hours sleep up until the 7th night and then we went all out and had about 7 hours sleep on the last night. We estimated we couldn't catch any teams in front or couldn't get caught from behind, and we were a bit weary. We were very weary. We weren't exactly "jumping out of our skin" though after this sleep. At least Ado no longer needed a rope tied to him to keep him in the right direction, and he no longer shook hands or talked to hallucinations any more. Sleep, like eating, were part of the necessary things to do and the fun things to look forward to were riding, trekking and kayaking.

The first leg on mountain bikes was the most fun because we had interaction with all 20 teams, spirits were high and in 2 1/2 hours we had left Broken Hill with a police escort (run out of town) to the tourist meccas of the Living Desert rock sculptures, dropped down Daydream Mine, relived history via the Silverton cemetery, onto the ghost town of Silverton and the Silverton pub, complete with Mad Max's car parked out the front and lots of paraphanelia inside to keep us entertained while searching for the next race clue to enable us to continue.

An important part of an adventure race, is that the course isn't marked, you find your own way. Checkpoints were given in a very informative race book which included history of the area and are given as grid references. We had 14! 1:100,000 maps. A 1:100,000 map covers a lot of area. We were going to cover a lot of kilometres, 700 kilometres was the advertised race distance but after the first leg, we realised this wasn't reality. It would be 700km as the crow flies. For the first 45km bike leg, we recorded 60km. All up we would have done 950km. Not always in the right direction. Sometimes we went over the same ground, more than twice (but not too often).

What were the roads like? The first 10km, a 5km stint in the middle and the last 20km into Broken Hill were bitumen. The rest were either rocky, sandy, corrugated, barely visible, may no longer exist, or covered in bindis or thorns or some form of annoying prickle.

The two kayak legs were smooth and no prickles, until the portages. To give an example of the benefit of a portage, one portage carrying the boats for 1km, saved about 9km of kayaking down the winding Darling River which flows very, very slowly. Carrying the boats is tough work but not much slower than kayaking, IF you have a clear run of vegetation and a riverbank that's accessible.

Getting back to leg one. At the end of the bike you have to dismantle it and put it into a bike box. That's off with the handlebars, pedals, seat, front wheel, tape it down and change shoes. The box is moved on for leg 2, 5, 8 and 11, theoretically a total of