

XPD AUSTRALIA 2004

On the 6th day God looked and was well satisfied with all his work. He had created Man, Women, the earth, the animals, heaven etc; but then he thought, “I haven’t created any misery yet”!!!

And so he created Hell, and called it “XPD AUSTRALIA”.

LEG 1 MOUNTAIN BIKE – 50 KM’S TIME TAKEN-3HRS 36MINS

STARTING TIME - 0900 HRS

Set out in a bunch start from Broken Hill. Rode to a rock formation called “The Sculptures” and had to write approximately 8 answers to questions in our book. From this point we had to navigate to an underground mine approximately 30 km’s away over some very inhospitable “Tracks”. Once at the mine we had to navigate to 5 separate areas in amongst the under ground mine shafts and then navigate our way back to the surface. From Daydream mine we then had to navigate to Silverton, approximately 10km away, and to our 1st transition.

TRANSITION 1 TIME TAKEN-40 MINS

This is the time it took us to dismantle our bikes and pack them into our bike boxes, along with all our bike gear, and prepare for our next leg. This transition also included our lunch preparation. We ate during the start of leg 2.

LEG 2 TREK - 45KM’S TIME TAKEN - 20 HRS 34 MINS

This leg started off ok, with us heading off due north of Silverton. Pretty soon the tracks disappeared and we had to navigate our way over a mountain range approximately 300 – 400 above sea level, which was ok until we lost the sunlight. The mountain range we were traversing included numerous amounts of 300 – 400 meter peaks and it was extremely difficult to differentiate which of these peaks had the location markers that we needed. Some-where during the early hours of the next morning we pitched our tent and had about 2½ hours sleep.

Our sleeping arrangement probably deserves a page or 2 all on their own, but what I can say is that 4 men

(all 80+ kg) do not fit comfortably into a 2 man tent. (We could only manage to take a 2 man tent, due to the massive weight we were already carrying.) Needless to say the “sport” of spooning will never be the same. If one of us wanted to turn over during our sleep we all had to turn over. Daybreak of day 2 and we saw things much clearer. We pushed on for another 4 ½ hours or so, and at about 1000hrs we had found our way to transition number 2.

TRANSITION 2 TIME TAKEN – 2HRS 5MINS

Assemble bikes/cook lunch/re-assess map co-ordinates for next leg, and shudder at the howling northerly wind that was blowing.

LEG 3 MOUNTAIN BIKE – 70KM'S TIME TAKEN-12HRS 51 MINS

This was not a happy leg for us!!! We started out on this leg at just before midday, on day 2. We headed north on a corrugated dirt road with a head wind that did not allow us to go much quicker than 10kph. We spent the next 5 or so hours being blinded and sand blasted by 30 – 40 kph headwinds. Then darkness fell. Darkness was not kind to us.

We decided to pick a path up over a cluster of hills, and we some-how ended up climbing over boulders and carrying our bikes on our shoulders for the next 5 or so hours. (This was not fun). By midnight we had re-gathered our bearings and headed for transition area number 3. Some-where around 2am we stumbled into camp; cooked a meal and collapsed in a heap for some well earned sleep.

TRANSITION 3 TIME TAKEN – 5HRS 40MINS

After a well earned 3 ½ hours sleep we were up packing our tent and gear, and eating some brekky. At about 0730 hrs on day 3, we left transition 3.

LEG 4 ORIENTEERING – 25KM'S TIME TAKEN – 5HRS 45MINS

This section was a circular route over some very rugged countryside where we had to find 5 unmanned checkpoints and then find our way back to the transition area. This section went ok and we found ourself back at the transition area at about 1 pm.

TRANSITION 4 TIME TAKEN – 1HR

We made this transition a quick one knowing that we had a long ride in front of us and we wanted to make good use of the remaining day light. We had lunch, packed our gear, organised our bikes, checked our maps and set off. Nothing had prepared us for what was coming. **4 of the next 5 legs would take us over 20 hours, per leg to complete.**

LEG 5 MOUNTAIN BIKE – 110KM'S TIME TAKEN – 22HRS

It was about 2pm on day 3 when we set out on this leg. It would take until midday of day 4 for us to complete it. The day light hours saw us progressing at a good pace and navigating our way well, but not long after night fall the temperature dropped dramatically, and the wind picked up considerably. At one stage during the night we tried to cook a meal, but the wind and dust storm was so strong that we couldn't get shelter any-where, and we decided to push on. Riding the bike during this night became a bit dangerous due to the fact that the dust was so thick that we had trouble even seeing the flashing light of the bike in front. Coupled to that was that our eyes were full of dust, and we were on the 3rd day with little sleep. Things were not real flash. We had a feed around 11 – 12 o'clock that night, and then pressed on until about 3am when tiredness took its toll, and we set up camp. About 3 hours later we were up and going again and continued through until midday where we found

transition number 5. Our oasis in the desert!!! A roadhouse in the middle of nowhere; and yes we had cash.

TRANSITION 5 TIME TAKEN – 2HRS 33MINS

After 22hours on the mountain bike leg we had arrived at a roadhouse in the middle of nowhere, and boy was it good. Cooked rissoles, chips, vegies, coke, hot coffee!!!! We left the roadhouse feeling like Sumo Wrestlers. We tried to justify our big feed by knowing we had a 75km trek in front of us, but after 4 days non stop of doing this stuff we didn't need an excuse. We finished our feed, dismantled our bikes and packed them ready for the transport trucks, re-stocked our packs, checked the maps and set off; again.

LEG 6 TREK – 75KM'S TIME TAKEN - 31 hours (Yes, you read right; 31 hours)

We set off from checkpoint 5 in good spirits thanks to our hot meal at the roadhouse. Its funny how things can change so quickly in these events. We left the roadhouse at around 3pm, and by about 8 – 9pm that night we were in the vicinity of our first unmanned checkpoint. According to our map it was in a cave (where Burke and Wills had camped), and according to our navigation skills we were in the right place. Little did we know that the cave we were in was the right one and that earlier that day a gust of wind had blown the checkpoint marker over the back of some rocks, which made it impossible to locate (especially at night).

We wasted the next couple of hours wandering along the range we were on looking for other caves trying to locate the marker. In the end we decided to push on and go for the next marker, hoping we would not incur a 2 – 4 hour penalty for missing the checkpoint. Some-where during this night we stopped and slept for a few hours until daybreak. Daybreak on day 5 and we were faced with nothing but open featureless plains, with the occasional dirt track or fence-line, but little else to take a positive bearing. We pushed onward through-out that day until we came to with-in a couple of km's from our next transition when darkness fell. We should have taken the next 30 – 45 mins to get to transition area number 6. Wrong!!! Once again we were lost. It was around 2140 when we finally stumbled into TA6. The darkness had once again been very nasty to us (Bugger). It was at this stage that we made a decision that we needed to sleep; big time. So we had a feed, a cuppa, pitched the tent and decided to sleep until sun-up.

TRANSITION 6 TIME TAKEN – 10HRS

We slept from about midnight until dawn next day. This turned out to be a smart move as there were some demoralising times ahead. We rose at dawn, ate breakfast, packed our gear and then put together our 2 man kayaks. We left transition 6 at about 0740. Our kayaks were a 2 man inflatable kayak supplied by the race organisers.

LEG 7 KAYAK-65KM'S TIME TAKEN - 25HRS 46MINS

We actually had a positive start to our 1st kayak leg. A team had left the transition area about 30mins before us, and paddled off into the distance. When we left ½ hour later we decided to paddle straight across to the other bank of the river and then carry the 2 kayaks and all our gear for about 750 meters across some pretty rough country.

This turned out to be a valuable move. We re-entered the water just in time to see the other team who had left 30 mins before us come into view.

This would be our high point of the day. We paddled, and paddled, and paddled, throughout that day and into the night, and as the temperature plummeted to 1 degree and we became wetter and wetter, and the river turned into a lake, and we got lost, again, we decided at about 2 – 3am to stop paddling and light a fire to prevent hypothermia. We had been paddling for almost 20 hours when we decided to stop and we were so cold that we had trouble even holding our paddles; and when it came time to light the fire 3 of us had a go, and we were shaking so violently from the cold that we could not co-ordinate the match to strike the box. I'm talking freezing bloody cold. We'd had enough. We pitched the tent and decided to sleep. Daylight broke and our spirits lifted instantly as we could see our way so much clearer. We arrived at transition area 7 at about 9.30am having just spent almost 26 hours on the kayak leg. We were very happy to be finished the kayak and back on solid ground.

TRANSITION AREA 7 TIME TAKEN - 6HRS 15MINS

Transition 7 was different from all the rest. This was the only point in the race that all teams had to stop for 6 hours; and so we ate, drank, checked our maps and then had a few hours sleep.

LEG 8 MOUNTAIN BIKE – 35KM'S GEOCACHE TIME TAKEN 3HRS 33MINS

After our 6 hours rest we set out on a 35km out and back course in to the town of Menindee. We had approximately 7 pre-determined landmarks in the town to locate, and answer preset questions about each landmark. We managed to do this, and then returned to the previous transition area at around dusk.

TRANSITION AREA 8 TIME TAKEN – 1HR 45 MINS

This was a big transition for us, due to the fact that we made (what turned out to be) the biggest decision of the adventure for us. The next leg was a 75 km kayak, but we decided that if we could pack all our gear, including the 2 kayaks, onto a bike and tie it all down then we could walk 65 km on dirt roads and possibly travel quicker than if we paddled the 75km. This was going to be “make or break” for us, because at day 7 we were starting to wonder if we were going to make the 10 day cut-off. (We still had a 75km kayak leg, 40km trek and 110km mountain bike to go).

LEG 9 KAYAK - 75km TIME TAKEN – 20HRS 14MINS

During our transition we did our sums and threw caution to the wind and decided to chance walking all our gear for 65kms. We left the transition at around 9pm with, 2 kayaks, 1 mountain bike, 4 paddles, 4 flotation devices and 4 backpacks. Our estimate was that we were walking down dirt tracks of Broken Hill with about 160 – 180 kg's.

“The 1st 7km’s took us 3 hours !!!”. This was not fun. At this rate we were going to chew up about 27 – 28 hours plus 3 or 4 to stop and sleep. We decided a short time later that it was time to rest. 5 or so hours later we decided to go again, as dawn broke things became much easier for us. That day we walked with all our gear from sun up, to sunset. As the sunset that afternoon on day 8 we walked into transition area number 9 having completed the “Kayak” leg in 20 hours. We were extremely pleased with our efforts, and more importantly, our strategy on this leg. We had gone from 14th position up to 11th position overall in this leg alone. We had made up a massive 10 hours on a team that had left the previous transition before we had even started leg 8. We were pumped.

Not only had we smashed the kayak leg but we had put ourselves in a position whereby there was nothing now that would stop us finishing with-in the 10 day cut-off. (Hopefully?)

TRANSITION 9 TIME TAKEN – 90MINS

We packed our kayaks away, prepared our packs, food and water; cooked a big feed and pigged out. We did everything as quick as we could in this transition as we were “pumped” and in 90 minutes we were ready to go again.

LEG 10 TREK – 40KM’S TIME TAKEN – 15HRS 30MINS

We left this transition just after nightfall and set off with a full head of steam. The fatigue we were feeling was superseded by the adrenalin from having such a great “Leg 9”. It’s a pity the adrenalin doesn’t last!!! Somewhere around midnight (give or take an hour; no-one can remember) we were all walking along kicking the dirt and falling asleep. We decided to stop and brew up a coffee. While resting we checked our maps and decided we could walk about another 2 – 3 hours and then pitch our tent. This was agreed on, and so we set off again. We made it about another 500 – 700 mtrs before falling asleep again while we were walking. (This was only minutes after having a coffee). Up went the tent and out went our lights.

We probably had about 5 – 6 hours sleep that night and at around 6am we hit the road again. Later that morning we stumbled into transition area number 10. We had just walked 105 km’s!!!.

TRANSITION AREA 10 TIME TAKEN – 3HRS

Our last transition of the race. We decided that we would leave our tent and sleeping gear behind at this transition and go for broke. We were going to finish this race tonight come hell or high water; so after a big feed, we put our bikes together, rechecked our maps and at about 1pm on day 9 we headed off.

LEG 11 MOUNTAIN BIKE – 110KM’S TIME TAKEN – 9HRS 16MINS

TODAY WE ARE HEADING HOME!!! We had to go hard during this leg. We had to cover approximately 60 – 70km’s before darkness fell because there was some particularly nasty navigational work in that 60 – 70km’s (and we no longer had a tent or sleeping gear), so go hard we did. We all struggled at different times during this leg with the associated muscle soreness, leg cramps, dizziness, hunger pains and

tiredness, but we pushed on. One of our members had a bung knee, which was exacerbated every time we hit patches of sand and had to get off our bikes and push. Some times we did not have a choice about getting off our bikes, as our trusty steeds decided to off load us unceremoniously on more than one occasion, but that didn't worry us too much because we were going home. Never before had we been so happy to see the lights of a town, as we were that night. We rolled into town at around 10.30pm on day 9 to the thunderous applause of at least 30 – 40 people. (Not really a spectator sport).

We had conquered the XPD Adventure Race!!! We had carted our backpacks with 6ltrs of water, 1st aid gear, wet weather gear, thermal clothing, tents, sleeping gear, not to mention food, for 9 days through some of the most inhospitable country Australia has to offer, and we did it through nights of 0 – 3 degree temperatures, and some how came out the other end intact. Now almost 7 weeks after finishing, our hands and feet are returning to normal, and the cold sweats in the middle of the night have subsided.

We set out on this odyssey as 4 friends who wanted to finish the biggest race imaginable to us, and to be better mates than we were before we started. We are now life long friends that share a special bond of being Adventure Racers. Thanks to my good mates Erin, Greg and Gavin. Thanks to Louise and Craig, who along with their team of dedicated volunteers worked tirelessly over the last few years to bring to Australia a truly professional ultra distance adventure race. Any-one thinking of having a go at adventure racing should check out their website at www.geoquest.com.au. They do heaps of smaller races also. Thanks also to “VERO” for their unquestionable backing and support, and a special thanks to our families who endure so much through a sport that is so demanding in many, many ways.

We hope we made you proud.

Leon Colbert.