

The Sting

By 'Starfactor' team member Terry McClelland, winner of NQ 24 hour Rogaine – Hornet's Nest

Rod Spinks is cautious. Among his close band of XPD tragics he is famous for his classic phrase "watch out for the sting in the tail", delivered on cue whenever his team mates ('mates' used liberally) appear to be enjoying themselves in an adventure race. 'The Sting' Spinksy refers to is the Craig Bycroft trait of ending a stage with a mentally and physically demanding task.

The name "Hornet's Nest Rogaine" promised a Sting and as Chris White handed out the Course map I was reminded that Willo (Brett Wilson) had been belted by a swarm of vicious wasps to the north of the Stannary dams (producing a quite painful yet comical jig which saw him lose his map) back in 2007.

By the time Mike Coleman, Chris and volunteers had erected the bright orange Adventure HQ tarps team Starfactor had agreed to a butterfly shaped course. The weekend was a family affair with our respective wives, Kim and Sandra teaming up to do a split 6 hour course and so for the first time we were keen to pass by the hash house to have a coffee break. I am of the opinion that visiting the HH during an event is usually an unproductive strategy. Not only does it usually involve backtracking, experience has shown that I tend to disengage – get out of the navigational zone.

As it turned out we cruised into Hash after midnight, three hours late, got to see one third of our support crew but managed to stay in the zone till control 97.

I will now describe in some detail our Rogaine, which to date, has been the hardest surface that I have raced over. Phyllite screes, quartzite blocks, spear grass, unmarked new roads, new fences and mining shafts meant that 20 minute kilometres was to be our maximum pace.

I will include a little detail as I have been asked by rogainers eager to step up to the championship 24 hour event what an advanced skill set entails.

12, new fence overshoot 62, unrecognisable mining area – missed 31 (collected next day – knoll was 1 meter above plain), 96 open shafts on most spurs, 70 amazing creek switchback loop, cruised cattle pad to 80, reminded of XPD John's memorial phrase 'fun doesn't have to be fun' as Rod and I traded limerick words on route to 95, view – spew, gain – pain.

Originally planned to head to 36 but after the slog to knoll 95 we followed ridge to 46, contoured east around head of creek and back along and down spur to 86. Peeled off saddle on 254 deg bearing, hit track and followed towards 36. The track disappeared and I predicted that 36 would be tough at night because the scale of the map gave away no secrets.

Team 'Green Ant' - Shane White and Max Bernstein had trouble finding 36 from 95 at night. Our 20m contour topo's show very few features but they do show many old non-existent roads which combine to make night navigation (even with a full moon) mainly a compass exercise in this rough terrain.

Green Ant was formidable competition - having displayed fitness, navigational excellence, endurance and teamwork in over a decade of rogaines and adventure events.

Shane White was the first soloist to complete the gruelling 150 km Great Wheelbarrow race whilst ex-triathlete Max is currently head Guide with Kokoda Spirit – a somewhat active job.

Bearing off 5 deg upstream meant a 100m walk down bluebell creek to junction 55. We legged it along cattle pads to 107 and 75 and then stumbled over spear grass hidden boulders before once again being saved by a cattle pad to guide us to 76. An accurate road to 47 and a new fence line to 85 were bonuses just on dusk. With Silva L1 headlamps in place we retraced to the known marked road at (070, 804) which we followed 250m till intersection with creek. The creek and compass led us to 61 and then on to a high pointer 108. We had run out of water at this point and so travelled directly to Cummings creek to fill up our 3 litre bladders. 27 took 10 minutes longer than necessary as age, night vision and a map control circle all conspired to hid details. We succumbed to utilising the magnifying lens on our Silva expedition compasses and were relieved to be able to see some minute features. We finally found our 54 mango tree at Orient Camp (a future site for HH surely). 41, 11 no water left in containers but heaps in dam, sludge tramp to springs at 34- all on bearings. Took road to 48 and then had a 45minute straight line tramp to 35. This section was very hard on the feet. Aimed west hoping to pick up old railway track but this obvious feature on map was non existent on ground at night and so had to use road and creek as our new reference point. We roaded back to 20 and HH for our midnight coffee but arrived 20 minutes later than expected as the road we were walking on was a new unmarked road.

(Intuition is an invaluable skill for NQ rogainers due to the poor state of our base maps. Even with major efforts by our setters and vetters to GPS new roads onto our maps, there are many inaccuracies due to age of our Topo's. I was truly amazed when first competing in the home state of Rogaining- Victoria. Every track was accurately marked.)

We changed our lights over to Silva LX 5 watt rechargeable. 10, 30, 63, and 81 were uneventful in the early hours. The map doesn't go close to depicting the slopes to 104 which required tree winching at times. Knoll 97 just appeared at the end of a wonderful spur but we originally planned to only see it once. By 4.30 am we had wedged ourselves into a northerly/easterly flowing junction after 18 mins of downwards spur walking on a 290M bearing towards 50. The sleep monsters had arrived and after our third attempt from 97 we agreed to forgo 50 and headed to 51. We agreed that lack of fitness led to major fatigue and the two bison feeding near control 97 at daybreak were also in complete agreement. *Our Sting had arrived.* 51 to 60 was once again slow and exhausting as we realized that a clean sweep of the north eastern controls was beyond our grasp. As we neared 77 by track it became obvious that the tracks did not align and so we once again changed tact. (Without an accurate reference point we could not fix a bearing to 77) We then limped home via 15, 31 and 21. I did note that Rod had enough energy to pen a category winning limerick on the way home. Starfactor thanks all for a well organised and challenging course.