

# Race report: The Rogue Adventuregain

By Ali Wright

**Team: ARea 51 (Ali Wright and Tim McInerny)**

**23 April 2010.** The night before the Rogue. The obligatory last minute emails and discussions regarding meeting times and places, food and gear, transport, weather, clothing and alarm-setting had all happened. Wayno's place it was. Meeting at 6:30am. So much for an 11am start meaning an extensive sleep, leisurely breakfast, perhaps time for the breakfast news update and then mosey on over to the car with gear at a respectable hour. I needed to be ready to leave at 6am. It would still be dark. And I wouldn't sleep again for approximately 32 hours. Crikey. Friday night was going to be a busy one.

**24 April 2010** dawned bright and sunny. Both race partners present. Check. Driver (Wayno) present. Check. All kit and gear present. Check. Enough food to fuel an army (Tim). Check. Enough pasta to feed a normal person for a week (Ali). Check. Enough room in the car. (Errr, you didn't actually need to see out of the back window did you Wayne??). Ok, check.

The car park was located near the D'Aguiar Range National Park at Cedar Flats, Mt Glorious Road, and it opened at 8am. I was very grateful not to be driving, rather to be sat in the back, nervous and excited about the race ahead in equal measures, and contemplating what it would involve. I did not envy the road riders we passed grinding it out up the constant incline towards Mount Nebo. One guy looked like he was about to cry. Little did I know that I would feel very similar emotions at approx 4am the next morning on the fated Stage 7 bike leg (more later).

All was relatively calm, organised and methodical in the ARea 51 camp. Maps were handed out approx 9am and by 10:45am, all maps were laminated, the route and stage legs analysed, transition boxes packed accordingly and the beginnings of plans formulated. We decided on rough cut off points for the long biking and trekking legs, allocating timings in conjunction with where we considered our strengths (biking and trekking) and weaknesses (paddling) to be. We also decided to allow 1 hour 15 to travel from the last transition point to the finish, to ensure that we did not incur the heavy penalties that accrue for late arrivals. Remember that 1 hour 15 allowance to the finish line. It will rear its head later.

So time flew between arrival at the car park and the mandatory briefing at 10:45am where Liam St Pierre (course organiser) summarised the rules, the spirit of the race and a couple of last minute changes regarding checkpoints. I remember being most alarmed by the fact that a couple of environmental workers had been chased by feral pigs in the area during the preceding week and had only escaped via climbing a tree!! (I spent a large amount of time on the first trekking leg scanning trees as we ran past for feasibility as escape routes; I wasn't seeing many easy-climbers. Yikes).

## **Stage 1 – Bike**

The staggered start commenced at 11am, with two teams going off at 10 second intervals. The first leg was a short bike leg and was fast and furious. A couple of short cuts missed by the earlier pack (us included) put the crowd together again shortly afterwards and it was only a long slog up a hill, pushing the bike, that started to separate the troops somewhat. The single checkpoint available was collected en route to transition, where we dropped the bikes, changed shoes and maps, and headed straight out onto the first of the trek stages.

## **Stage 2 – Trek / run**

This was where strategic decisions on route and checkpoint collection came into play. Navigation was fairly tricky in a few spots where we were following a bearing through some bush-bashing territory devoid of paths, tracks or many discerning features. Given the territory we were passing through it was also very difficult to gauge how far and how fast we were travelling. Fortuitously stumbling upon one checkpoint we were searching for, almost at the point when we thought it might be one we would have to drop, was a great lift to the spirits. From there on the nav was more straightforward and we returned to transition having decided to drop two lower value checkpoints which didn't seem worth going for given the distance / height gain involved.



By this time, having checked out the area in daylight from the top of hills to the bottom of valleys, it was becoming ever clearer that the long night time trek and bike legs we faced were going to be pretty hardcore.

### Stage 3 – Bike

Back on the bikes we smashed out this leg at a fairly cracking pace and didn't make any nav errors. We were feeling good, working through those food stocks, slurping the energy juice and mentally psyched for those strength-zapping sit-on-tops that lay in wait at the next transition.

### Stage 4 – Kayak

This leg was preceded by a mystery fun activity worth an extra 50 points that seemed a shame to miss so we both opted to partake in tubing a very short section of the Upper Brisbane River. The water was very refreshing and, apart from me getting separated from my tube and carried in a different direction, then having to wade over to a tree to retrieve it, all was good.



Thanks to some rather fantastic blocks of foam I'd gathered we had extremely well cushioned rear ends for the kayak leg which made it infinitely more of a joy than expected. In fact it was also much easier than either of us had imagined, helped of course by us travelling *with* the current down river. (And by us being mentally scarred by some draining sit-on-top action in past races where we certainly weren't current-assisted)! We chose to only drop one checkpoint on this leg as the remainder were on the route we would travel anyway.

As we paddled along, chatting, following progress on the map, watching the sunset, observing the people that had set up camps at certain spots alongside the river and were enjoying a beer, I think in hindsight this was the least painful part of the race. Definitely not expected. But don't get me wrong, my arms were very glad to see the exit point and get rid of that paddle 'cause it sure wasn't a lightweight carbon one that I was using!

### Stage 5 – Bike

By now it was approx 7pm, pitch black and having spent the last few hours in a kayak we were needing some fuel. The pasta awaiting us in transition was inhaled rather than eaten! Bags were loaded with more goodies. Thermals were put on in preparation for the night stages. Bike lights were activated and off we went into the night.

Unfortunately stage 5, which should have been a relatively straight forward 9km to the next transition, turned into a nightmare. A humungous, sloppy navigation error (that we kicked ourselves for a long time afterwards, and in fact I am still annoyed at myself now) saw us instead do 24km, slogging it out up a large (and completely unnecessary) hill. By the time we realised our mistake, turned around and positively burned rubber to correct the error, we had lost one hour and, as I soon realised, used up a valuable amount of strength and energy. Bummer (a toned down version of the words used at the time).

## Stage 6 – Trek / run

Oh, what to do. The initial decision was whether to go North or South first. The terrain was going to be punishing. We pondered routes over more pasta-shovelling and had to revise our planned timings given the debacle of stage 5.



It was clear that we weren't going to get all the checkpoints so after a few mental points calculations and with a rough route in mind, we headed North first. This leg was very challenging and at times frustrating, particularly when we had to drop one checkpoint despite being sure that we were extremely close to it and were being fooled by the creek bed that it was hiding in.

By this stage we'd been going for well over 12 hours, the temperature had dropped and tiredness was setting in. The fog we observed hanging over the valleys from above proved a nemesis below when we descended into the thick of it and headlights bounced light straight back. Concentration was harder to maintain so nav became even trickier (not to mention it being

pitch black and foggy). Jeesh there were some incredible spider webs, complete with evil-looking spider with huge orb-like bodies. And I didn't see many trees I could shinny up if feral pigs came for me!

Having returned from the Northern route we didn't feel we had time to go South so it was onto the bikes where we had initially hoped to 'clean up'...

## Stage 7 – Bike

Having been introduced to some of the terrain we would be navigating whilst on foot in stage 6, I was not relishing the prospect of 5 hours on the bike, in the damp and cold, struggling with energy levels. Stage 7 turned out to be brutal. And once you'd committed to the longer route, there was no shortcut to the exit. Oh no. You just had to suck it up. I would estimate that 6 of the next 8 hours were spent pushing bikes up hills that were like near vertical walls (NVW). I have never experienced anything like it and plan never to repeat it! These NVWs would have proved a challenging walk alone, only the fittest ultra-runners would contemplate them as a training ground to shuffle up, and here we were pushing bikes up them. Over and over again. This was far from enjoyable. I just wanted to lie on the rocks and sleep til dawn! Tim put in an absolutely sterling effort by helping me with my bike and rigging up a tow so that he was hoisting up two bikes and his body. I have no idea how. He was my saviour. At one point I skidded in a mini-rockslide and lay on the NVW with my bike on top of me, wondering if I would just skid to the bottom again. It took two back-to-back chocolate bars to get me moving again. Thank goodness for bite sized snickers. (Note to self: One bag is not enough).

In hindsight we should have amended our plan when we realised how punishing the terrain was and opted for more of a straight line route to the kayak to pick up many more points there, despite being stronger bikers than paddlers. This is what the majority of the top teams did and this would have seen us score higher than we did. But you do these races to learn and learning certainly occurred.

## Stage 8 – Kayak

Yes, well, we did plan to have 3 hours on this leg but spent it all pushing bikes up NVWs. So we arrived at the transition for the kayak at 10:21am, just as the gear was being packed away. However transitions scored points so that was an extra 50 in the bag. Cha ching. Tim seemed to be burning along at this point whilst I was going slower and slower, in a whole world of pain, and quite convinced my feet were bleeding. The lady at transition told us it was about an hour back to the finish. We knew that late penalties were harsh. And we had 39 minutes to make it, at the very end of a gruelling 24 hour race. A little voice in my head told me to give up hope of making it back by 11am. I was ready to drop. Luckily there was another voice, the iron will of determination speaker, that told me to dig in one last time and fight! And this voice won.

## Stage 9 - Bike

How we managed it I don't know but we absolutely smoked that last leg in a remarkable time to arrive at the finish with 11 minutes to spare!!

Game over!!

Overall the Rogue was a very challenging, fun race which demonstrated excellent course planning and organisation skills by Liam and was supported by fantastic volunteers who ensured there was a friendly cheer at each transition and again at the end of the race. Wayno you did a great job.

The learning and experience gained by participating in such a race was invaluable and if Rogue part II rears its head, I want to be on the start line. My route will be very different though!

