

## 24hr Rogaining Championships 2010, Passchendaele 18/9/2010

A few weeks before the event I asked Robbie if he was keen to join me for the 24hr event. He was keen and asked if it was OK for his mate Steve to join us. Obviously I asked if Steve was up to it and Robbie assured me he was super fit (a very capable ironman triathlete) and would just hang on for the experience and try to learn to navigate. I really enjoy introducing/encouraging new people to the sport and I love it when people from the waxed legs brigade (triathletes) dare to venture away from the courses of fixed distance and known terrain to the more unknown, scratchy and rugged nature of adventure races and rogaine. Steve really did have a nice set of tanned, waxed legs, so nice in fact that Robbie couldn't help himself touching them during the drive from Woodford to the event.

Maps issued and planning commenced. We opted for a course that would take us in an anti-clockwise direction and had assessed that the course was definitely possible to sweep all the CPs with a distance of approximately 96km. Better to aim high and fail than to aim low and come back early. First little hiccup, pre race start was Robbie's compass needle showing 180degrees reverse! No kidding, his compass somehow had it's polarity reversed somehow so he was in a mad hunt to try find a replacement.

Midday, off we bolted to CPs 56, 72, 60. Nice pace I thought, these 2 fella's are strong, like to run and seem to be on a mission to get this thing done to be back in time for breakfast! Secretly I think I was hoping they may slow up slightly, I didn't want to be rushed too much! For the next 6 hours things didn't slow up at all. In fact we hit the first water drop (CP 10W) at 1600, 24km gone and 30minutes ahead of schedule. Arriving ahead of plan? That never happens! With not many major features or tracks along the whole area this country was fantastic for rogaining and navigation would be challenging for the entire time. The plan was to continue to try and smash as many CP's as we could before darkness would slow us to mostly walking. At 1800 we arrived at CP85, 1120 points in the bag and very content with how things had gone (only one CP slightly difficult to find, CP80) and all of us in good spirits. A couple of hours into the event both Rob and Steve discovered that my body works like a pretty efficient little steam engine. I put food in, it burns to tick the engine over and gas consistently comes out. However what I couldn't understand was why they would run behind me so often? Did they not bring enough food and thought they could get fuelled themselves on my excess methane???

Into the night we went. It was now that our feet started getting wet and the beginning of the carnage on the feet. An hour in Steves light failed. He was reduced to using his backup light, hardly more than a rear light used on bicycles. This could really make it tough on his morale. 4hours into the night, 10hours into the event, Steve thought he was slowing us down too much. He suggested he go back to the Hash House and Robbie & I continue on. Not a chance. If we were going to suffer then he sure as hell was. No problem I thought, we'll head back to the Hash House now, but on the way we plan on getting about another 1500 points. I guess being a pretty slick ironman triathlete 10hours is about the longest his body is programmed to run for? So, the next 14 hours will be a good test, character building I thought. Robbie seemed to also have a wry smile on his face. Sadistic buggers aren't we?

On through the night we went. Given the difficulty of the navigation we were pretty happy to see daylight (Steve I think more than anyone and well done with his severe lack of lighting and no complaints) and to have collected all controls we went for, another 1220 points. Around 0700 at the waterdrop near CP130 we ran in Richard and Tamsin. Didn't sound like they had had a very successful

night, or, maybe Richard was trying to pull our leg so we'd feel we had beaten them and would slacken off? Need to watch these old blokes, in competition never trust them, they can be rather wiley at times....

The next 5 hours or so Steve was really beginning to struggle. He was digging deep and not complaining but I think he did seem to wonder if there was something wrong with the people that do these events in their free time. A couple of quotes I can remember, that brought humour to Rob and myself were:

"You blokes are mad crazy \*&^\$s!"

"the only thing I regret is f\*&^ing joining you guys!!".

Unfortunately the morning brought very few points, in fact only 410 points. We were forced to a very sub-standard pace walk and pretty much direct back to the Hash House looking forward to the best part of 24hr rogaines, the AWESOME food that is always provided. We arrived back 35 minutes early, later to find we had paced ourselves perfectly finishing on equal highest score but 23 minutes earlier than the equal team of Richard and Tamsin. Richard/Tamsin, I am sure that must hurt after nearly 24 hours to know you were "that close". From our perspective very satisfying to know we hadn't exerted ourselves more than required.

Thanks for Paul Guard, his team and the landowners for organising such a fantastic event. Without their work and permissions we wouldn't be able to put ourselves through such misery. The course was quality and we thought that all but one checkpoint we spot-on to the correct locations as marked on the map. Also thanks to my teammates Robbie Andrews and Steve Gage who I really enjoying racing with and had amazing physical and mental strength. Well done all.

Darren Smith



PS. Talking on the phone to Steve the next day, I was stoked to hear that even after his ordeal (and nursing feet shown in pictures above) he is keen and looking forward to another rogaine (6 or 8 hour). The perpetual trophy is also sitting on display in his kitchen to remind himself every morning that no matter what happens that day it cannot possibly be as painful for as long as that ordeal at the 2010 Passchendaele 24hr Rogaining Championships....

**Addendum: The following is an addition added by Mr Steve Gage himself after reading Darren Smiths account of the event....**

Darren has either forgotten about my whinging or is being overly polite. I became involved in this event during a brief discussion with Robbie Andrews a month or so back. The conversation went something like this:-

"Robster, what are you up to?"

"I'm going to do a rogaine, do you want to come?"

"That would be cool, I'd like to learn to navigate"

"Well, sign up to this website and we'll do it, we will just cruise around and it will be a good fun muck around"

A couple of hours later I call Rob back:-

"Umm, I'm on the website, which race am I signing up for, the 8, or 15 or 24hr?" and I just get laughter back down the line from Rob.

So the day arrives and we pick up Smithy on the way to the event. Within  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour I realise that this is not going to be just a "fun muck around", these guys are talking about winning the event (and both of them have won it previously). I think to myself, how hard can it be, I'm a reasonable longer distance triathlete.

Things I learnt from my first Rogaine:-

1. You are all crazy
2. The word rogaining is derived from the names of three of the founders, Rod Phillips, Gail Davis (née Phillips) and Neil Phillips (RoGaiNe, hence 'rogaining', 'rogainer' etc) who were all members of the Surrey-Thomas Rover Crew (Melbourne) which organized the world's first rogaine. The name was formally adopted by the Victorian Rogaining Association at its inaugural annual general meeting in August, 1976
3. Being a shaved legged, reasonable performing, ironman triathlete, does not mean you are tough
4. A waterdrop checkpoint is just that. There is nobody there to greet you, no body to tell you are doing well, no dancing girls, no music, no warm fire, nothing. (but the fruitcake was fantastic)
5. Hashing originated in December 1938 in Kuala Lumpur, when a group of British colonial officers and expatriates began meeting on Monday evenings to run to rid themselves of the excesses of the previous weekend. The original members included A. S. Gispert who is recognised as the Father of Hashing. A. S. Gispert suggested the name "Hash House Harriers" after the Selangor Club Annex, where the men were billeted, known as the "Hash House" for its notoriously monotonous food. Apart from the excitement of running and finding the trail, harriers reaching the end of the trail would be rewarded with beer, ginger beer and cigarettes. (read, yummy fruitcake, pasta and burgers).
6. If your teammates call you "twinkle toes", it doesn't mean you are fast and light on your feet.
7. A "watercourse" does not mean a nice creek where you could take you better half for a romantic picnic. It means that if it ever rained hard enough for a week straight, (technically speaking) water might trickle down the dry parched crack indicated as a creek on the map.
8. Unless you really enjoy twisting both ankles several times, being felled by invisible logs and rocks in the dead of night, accidentally increasing your protein levels by running into spiders webs (and hoping they are mildly poisonous so you can have a legitimate excuse for not finishing the race), whilst chasing the fading headlights of you team mates - Bring a good working light if you ever attempt to do a 24 hr rogaine.
9. Your teammates can't see you tears at night

10. *I have the utmost respect for anybody who might have a "rogaine tattoo". Anybody who knows about triathlon knows there are many athletes who walk tall and proud with the M-Dot symbol (Ed: that's an ironman tattoo) tattooed somewhere on their bodies. I don't have one (cause I'm scared of needles), but they've got nothing on you crazy bunch*

*Having said all that, I am inspired. My wife (who incidentally laughed and said "I knew it", when I told her I was a liability and whinged all race) does the odd adventure race, and we would both like to learn the art of navigation. We will be showing up to do shorter races, at a much more civilised pace. To my ex-team-mates (I doubt they will have me back) Darren "NAVMAN" Smith and Robbie "100MPH" Andrews, thanks for dragging my sorry soul around the course. However, the biggest thanks goes to my fellow competitors and the race organisers. I have a newfound respect for you and your sport, the food and comradery post race was excellent, and I learnt a fair bit about myself.*