

2009 QRA Bigaine

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A week out from the Get-wet Bigaine saw me without a partner and a growing list of “Sounds great, I would love to, but.....” responses from people I’d tried to call in as team mates. Fortunately, Rob Ormsby, a mate from the adventure racing scene, was playing bachelor for the weekend and was able to step in on short notice two days before the event. Our vessel for the day was to be a Canadian canoe previously owned by my parents and which was older than me. It has seen extensive use and numerous fibreglass patch jobs, the most recent of which was less than a week old but enough to see that only a minimal amount of water leaked in.

The drive to Ewen Maddock Dam was uneventful, the hardest bit of work all day being the portage of the >40kg canoe plus gear down to the water’s edge. After marking up the map and comparing proposed routes with other teams, the general consensus seemed to be the same: an anticlockwise circuit of the lake beaching for a long run loop out to the west to pick up the big points on foot. A sweep of the course was definitely on the cards, however teams would need to move and navigate well on the big trek leg in the hills. The last time a Bigaine was held in Queensland was back in 2006 on the Hinze Dam: it was one of my first rogaines and probably the most enjoyable to date for scenery and fun out on the water. It was apparent that this event would have significantly less paddling and more running, however being out on the water with a whole bunch of other teams was brilliant.

The start was very hectic as we missed most of the briefing before a rush of teams to the launch of the boats. The field seemed pretty evenly split between canoes and kayaks, with many of the “unlimited class” teams on single skis. Amazingly, we managed to hang onto the back of a number of skis, TK2s and mirage kayaks at the start and due to a lucky spot of the flag in a hollow tree stump were the first to the initial check point. The next few checkpoints were a real blast as teams fought their way through the thick patches of reeds (which extended up to 50m into the water off shore) to search the banks for the marker flags.

All too quickly we were finished with the first paddle leg and heading for land to pick up the majority of points available on an anti-clockwise loop of the surrounding forestry. The first couple of checkpoints came easily, however we lost a bit of time at the next CP not staying on an unmarked track which in hindsight probably would have taken us straight there. A refill of the water, which was disappearing at an alarming rate this early into the event saw us heading over the train tunnel to next checkpoint, 62. Apparently a lot of teams had trouble locating this CP. Described as being located at the “Rocky head of creek”, there were a number of small creeks branching off in pretty thick scrub. In the end, we were lucky to find the flag hidden in a patch of lantana, much higher up the creek line than I would have expected. The course setter did a solid job of getting the flag in there as we both had to crawl in and out on hands and knees to reach the punch. Upon examining the map at the start of the event and seeing how much of the event was going to be on either tracks or water, I decided against the use of gaiters, which definitely proved to be a mistake. A few scratches on the legs always makes for good conversation at work on the Monday anyway.

From here, we hit the big points which, although appearing quite close together, were a lot of work given the steep terrain. A bit of confusion due to a couple of unmarked tracks, and some route

revision on the fly possibly cost us some time, however these errors were only minimal. Three of the checkpoints were located on large power poles (listed as 1, 2 and 3 respectively). I thought it would be a good idea to look at power pole number 4 on the way to 3 as well, but the less said about that, the better. Picking up checkpoint 72 on the way out, it was a long, hot run back towards the river. I had run almost dry of water at this stage, so it was decided to stop at the local primary school for a refill. We unfortunately had to visit three sets of drinking fountains before we could locate one without the words "Do not drink from this drinking tap" labelled above it. The course setters had also had a bit of fun, hanging CP32 up a tree suspended over some murky water that I definitely didn't want to fall into and assigning it the description "Backwater". I was starting to drag my feet by now and was definitely glad to be back in the boat and on the water after clearing the western half of the map.

Despite doing the first paddle in good time, we had taken about 30 minutes longer than hoped on the trek and it was clear we had to drop some CPs on the way back. Picking up the remaining paddle CPs, we had time to run into the eastern side of the map for a 40 pointer, however it was decided to leave CP 26. Back into the canoe for one last trip across the lake from CP10, we had 17 minutes to spare but decided not to risk going for the other remaining checkpoint (CP15) and instead legged it for home. All told, we collected all but two of the checkpoints (30 points shy of clearing the course), backing up our win in the canoe class and finishing third overall. Overall winners Brit and Gary did indeed sweep the course. The day was rounded off with a brilliant feed, almost worth the cost of the entry fee alone. A big thank you to organisers and volunteers who made the event possible. As a recent inductee into the QRA committee, I'm only just starting to learn about the amount of voluntary time and effort that goes into staging one of these events.