

Race Report: The Rogue 8 hour

By Ali Wright – Team RUSH:

Russell Stringer

Shaun Lauder

Ali Wright

My message to the weather Gods apparently got deciphered incorrectly as I was greeted by a damp and drizzly dawn on Saturday morning. No matter though. There were uplifting tunes playing in the car, I was packed and ready to go and, even better, knew *where* I was going. Always a good start.

Race HQ was at Allawah Road Scout Camp, Mount Crosby, and by the map handout time at 7:30am, most competitors had installed some form of precipitation protection device, in our case fashioned from a tent fly sheet, walking poles and some clever pegging. An occasional poke to the 'roof' to facilitate drainage kept us dry as we huddled around the table and pored over the maps. Where to go? What to do? How long to spend on each leg? Having read the pre-race information I was intrigued about the course maps given that teams could opt to do as much or as little of any leg as they wished. We were spoilt for choice in terms of the possibilities; it was clear that time management, route choice and precise nav were going to be crucial to a winning race strategy.

The options:

Map A: Kayak

Maps B and C: Trek

Map D: Bike

Our initial thoughts were that the trek leg would work to our combined strengths and so we should start on that. Russ and Shaun had estimated a rough travelling speed for the paddle, bike and trek and from this we worked out potential points to be gained per half hour according to different route choices. Definitely more of a mathematical approach than I have taken to previous races - I like this strategy! Our initial thoughts were that we would move onto the bike second and then the Northern, hillier trek leg third, with the option of transitioning back onto the bike if need be. So the paddle would be dropped. Luckily we had flexibility built into our plan - always a key ingredient as you check out race conditions, course conditions plus body and equipment conditions en route...

9am: The Start – Leg 1 - Trek

Teams were firing off in all directions on all 3 modes of transport! We started off on our southern route as planned, heading in the same direction as a couple of other teams but by 20 mins or so into the race calmness returned and we were alone. Luckily our route largely avoided intense bush bashing and close encounters with lantana, much to Shaun's gaiter-less legs' delight! We incorporated a swim over the channel which was in fact rather refreshing, although I wasn't breaking any world records with trainers and gaiters dragging me backwards! We were rewarded for our efforts with an extreme checkpoint voucher = grins all round and a quick high 5. With some excellent navigation by the boys we cleared this trek section with the exception of a 20 pointer which we calculated wasn't worth the extra time to pick up at the end. My job was mental arithmetic time and points tracker girl and I concluded that we had achieved our target points per time. Cha-ching. 2.5 hours down and time to move on to the next leg!

On the way back to HQ Shaun raised a very good suggestion - maybe we should consider re-instating the paddle to give our legs a rest. After all, the pre-race analysis had suggested we could clock up a similar number of points in the time available and, provided the water level was high enough, we might be able to motor along...

We all agreed with the adaptation to the plan so after a quick transition where we picked up pfd's and vacuumed up some food, we rode our bikes over to the start of the paddle.

Leg 2 - Paddle

I was pleasantly surprised at the speed with which we seemed to motor along, choosing to head East and go for checkpoints 4 through 11. All were located fairly easily, with the exception of checkpoint 7 which was partly missing in action, the remainder being guarded by angry geese. Eek! (Ed: the flag was there but the electronic punch had been stolen).

There were a couple of baby rapids and lie-down-and-DUCK NOW (under the pipes) moments to add a bit of excitement and extra speed (water-propelled downstream, grunt-propelled upstream) to the trip. The rapids also broke our double ski rudder given the water was so shallow. Luckily this was expertly bent back into shape by Shaun which corrected us from constantly veering to the left! The rocky outcrop checkpoint was the most challenging, not because we couldn't locate it, more due to the quicksand effect of the river edge upon exiting the ski. I sunk practically thigh deep in the stuff and had difficulty un-wedging each leg to 'scramble' over to the rock.

Our points per hour average was clocking up nicely on the way out...in fact we were exceeding it... but of course we clocked nothing on the way back so previous self-congratulation largely evaporated. But nothing to be done about that but dig in and paddle harder! The river on the western side of the put-in point looked narrower from the map (= harder, slower going) and we had already spent nearly 2.5 hours on the paddle so we decided to drop checkpoints 2 and 3 and get back to the bikes.

By now time was really zooming by at an alarming rate - only 3 hours left! So much to do, so little time...

Leg 3 - Bike

So, we had 3 hours to kill off as much as possible of the bike leg. Shaun and Russ expertly modified our original proposed course en route and off we went, heading south first in a clockwise loop, before moving North of HQ. There were a couple of tricky points where side tracks and track junctions had to be negotiated and counted very carefully, but these were navigated with only a minor glitch meaning we collected all of the checkpoints we were aiming for. We necessarily had to drop a few at the end due to time shortages, however we finished the event with 3 minutes to spare so a pretty efficient conclusion!

In summary:

I felt our route choice and leg splits worked well. It will be interesting to compare ours to other competitors.

Awesome navigation by the navigators. I can't claim too much involvement in that achievement, but I did my best with the multitasking: communicating control descriptions, time keeping, score keeping, and general mental arithmetic tasks!

The Rogue 8 was a great course and thanks and congratulations go to Liam St Pierre for organising another fantastic event. Not to mention the army of volunteers involved before, during and after the race. This territory could easily stage 12 hours (minimum) of fun and adventure!

As for RUSH, this was our debut adventure together – the warm up for the biggie in two weeks - and we had a great time. ☺ Bring on Hells Bells.... I think....