

What a great weekend. First up, huge kudos to Liam and all the volunteering crew. It was some of the prettiest country in the SE corner, and a well organised and executed race. I felt that as Liam mentioned at least twice on Sunday he enjoyed reading race reports, it was honestly the least I could do but type one up. So here it goes...

Had planned on doing the 2014 Rogue24 since last year's event. I had one of my regular partners in crime put his hand up way back then too, but he and 4 other partners went begging since then, as recently as 2 weeks before, leaving me a possible pull out. Thankfully Merrick Ekin's came through as a last minute keen bean, despite me warning him that half of the others had pulled out because they injured themselves in the lead up and I may be jinxed. I knew Mez through climbing and The Goat's connection (who were also racing), and while we had both previously been at rogaines together, we had not raced in the same team before this one. We rolled out late Friday night. Wow, HQ had gone up a notch from previous editions. Though not a soul was still up it seemed. Despite one of our cabin mates texting me the details as to which half they were in, we went creeping into our cabin not entirely sure we were in the right half. My ay-up beamed right into the face of a bleary eyed Paul Maxwell which gave me satisfaction in knowing we had picked the right side.

Morning, and maps. We were stoked that The Goats had set up a table large enough for us all to prep on, but true to form, it was a devious plan to pinch ideas in the end. When asked our plans, we cited the cliché "keep moving, quick transitions, conservative planning", which was honestly as far as we had gotten anyway. Mez was quite off the couch so to speak, and I had not been doing much besides running either since new year (other than 4 months of sleep deprivation training with the birth of my second son) so we were not sure what to expect from ourselves. Mez also does not run. Ever. I already knew this, but was also inwardly aware that the only thing I might have some conditioning for was in danger of being rendered null and void. I asked if even on flat open trails and roads was a slow jogging option. He patiently pointed out he might be able to go for an hour, and then I would have to piggy back him the rest of the race when his knees exploded. Point taken.

Stage 1 (Trek). The event got under way at 11.01am, which meant we only had 23 hours and 59 minutes to be out and about maximum. We quickly discussed there and then, deciding not to review our route plan, though were consequently one of the last teams to cross the starting line as the usual rush of runners raced off down the road towards the gorge. We found ourselves stepping in stride just behind the 2 Goat's teams at the very rear. The competition heated up very early with them as Mez made the call to short cut through the park and cut the corner off the road. This saw us not only close the gap, but actually push in front of them by a good metre or so.

Once in the gorge itself, our suspicions were confirmed that this leg would suit us well (having both spent a fair chunk of time over the years bashing about in similar terrain all in the name of fun) and limit, at least early on, the advantage the strong trail runners would gain.

The only real hiccup came whilst trying to squeeze through a bottleneck with 3 or 4 other teams. I managed to step on an increasingly wet patch of rock and slipped with one leg ending up fully immersed. Apart from a good dose of humility with it happening a mere metre from the nearest competitor, it slowed down the pace a bit until my shoe dried out enough again. Silly sod.

At some point, all the leap frogging back and forwards with other teams seemed to sort itself out and we were travelling with similarly paced teams. Most of the second half of the gorge was spent with the Adventure Angels duo out on their first ever 24 (we heard Seb wooting long before we saw her) and the good folk from teamexplore. This continued until the rock hopping ended and the trails appeared again, and both teams ran off again at a trot, leaving us on our lonesome.

A little bit of bother finding CP7 after paying too much attention to the trails marked on the map and not the contours. We saw the AA's again at CP12 and walked into transition together after that.

I think that this stage was one of the finest backdrops for a navigation race I have done.

TA. Highlight: Cold coconut water.

Stage 2 (Kayak). We wanted to try to clear the first kayak before nightfall. It was a beautiful afternoon to paddle in another speccy part of the world, and we both felt relaxed paddling. The tension camp chairs Mez had used at the inaugural Rogue24 got an absolute thumbs up from me, making the red tubs actually comfortable. We set into a maintainable rhythm with a background of badly sung tunes ranging from pirate songs to Blind Melon to Banjo Paterson poems.

The dead and bloated roo floating just off CP17 had us glad the day light was there again as we picked it out visibly first rather than nasally and gave it a nice wide berth. In the end, the last CP was collected just on nightfall following a glorious sunset, and we got back to the transition not long after that.

TA. Highlight: Fresh change of clothes.

Stage 3 (Trek). Again, we planned on clearing this one, and set about it generally keeping just ahead of our estimated times. It was on this leg that Mez started bleating anytime we saw a crowd of 4 headlights coming our way thinking it was our cabin-mate rivals, but more often than not we just got strange looks from other teams we did not know. Mez also suggested dropping CP26, but I stubbornly stuck to the idea of nabbing all the CP's on the trek – probably our only real mistake for the stage - it was a bit of a horror show getting to it approaching from the northern side and we ended up cutting into our MTB allocated time by over half an hour.

TA. Highlight: Hot food and slightly longer transition. It is amazing how fairly plain food suddenly tastes great if you just add boiling water after 11 hours of trail food only.

Stage 4 (MTB). So, settling into a night on the bike, we seemed to climb and climb and climb for the first few hours. We dropped a couple of planned CP's early on trying to make up about 45 minutes we had lost on the previous trek, and I began to feel like we possibly could have blown it a little. A friendly team at CP37 summed it up with "just going through the motions". We burnt a couple more CP's, but at least got back on time. I started to enjoy it again come CP43 as it was entirely downhill from the previous CP40. By CP42 I was feeling good about the world again and content with the prospect of the long climb back up to CP46 and beyond. Mixing it up with a few other teams on the way up who seemed similarly over the undulations helped as well.

The event highlight for us was dawn (as it often seems to be), but not just for the second wind it gave us – riding down to CP55 with the pink sky breaking over rolling green hills and gullies filled with fog was both beautiful and inspiring. I rolled all the way down to the main road sucking slow deep breaths of contentment and very happy with my lot in life.

It was not that long after and again we were delighted, this time being so thankful we took a clockwise direction and were riding down (and not up) the road north of Lake Perseverance.

TA. Highlight: Eating something other than orange shot blok jubes.

Stage 5 (kayak). We set about the last kayak stage happy to be off our feet initially, but unlike the relaxed easy feeling we had paddling the previous day, from the first stroke we both felt tired and sore. The lack of conditioning was starting to show. The hike into CP62 was also slow compared to

yesterday in the gorge, even after Mez decided he would put shoes on a hundred metres or so up. Nevertheless, you can't fault the paddling location, and with the sun out again teams encountered were generally all happy and smiling.

The event finished up with the archery (Mez went up first and did what was needed with his first 3 arrows) and SUP boarding (fun, and glad I was talked into it, although the wake boarding boat made things a little interesting for a first timer...), but with only 40 minutes left we ran out of time for the orienteering.

Best QRA run event I have done IMHO, covering a wide suite of skills outside the usual run/ride/paddle. I was wrecked to be honest, and was a tad sore Monday, but in a good way. Started with a top third placing as a bit of a goal, and snuck in there, so all good from that front too. I feel I may have finally gotten on top of race nutrition a bit as well, which has often been my bane on longer events. To top it off, got a random lucky draw prize and nabbed a carton of the Coconut Groove coconut water we had been chugging delightedly all race.

Thanks. Mez, cheers mate, was an absolute pleasure. Again, thanks to Liam and crew obviously – you set the bar high. The Goats for the friendly banter and post war stories as always. Also the generous sponsors, especially the Coconut Groove folk which we so very much appreciated. All the other teams who smiled or shared a joke out on the course. And finally but most of all my wife for taking the 2 kids for 2 nights while I went and had selfish fun playing about in the bush (in response to your blog statement Liam, she said to let you know she was up at 3am with a not-so-asleep baby reading your posts).

Until the next one 😊