

Raid 100 Race Report – Fuse Creative

In the company of three other Auckland-based pairs, our Fuse Creative vet women's team headed across the ditch with a lot of excitement and a good dose of trepidation. While one half of our team (Anne Lowerson) has a wealth of expedition race experience, the other half (Leigh Cockerill) is a relative newbie to the long format AR world. In addition, the new 100 hour time limit rogaine format added another untested level of tactics and strategy to an already demanding event.



The day before the start was a chance to get all our gear into one place, catch up with old friends and meet some new ones. It was a hive of activity in the Tallebudgera sports stadium, with people trying out the kayak fleet for size, rapidly cobbling together seats, (we made a dash to Big W to grab some pool noodles to make ours) backrests and portage devices, fine-tuning bikes and fixing last-minute mechanicals, stocking up on food for the next four days and being manacled with a nav-light wrist tracker that would be with us for the duration of the race.



All that was abandoned at 3pm when the maps and course logistics were handed out and from that point on everyone was head-down marking up their maps and trying to make sense of the massive mission ahead of us. The amount of planning and groundwork that goes into setting up a race like this is unfathomable and the level of detail supplied with the maps and course notes was testament to months of meticulous planning by Liam and his amazing team. Somehow we managed to get everything into our gear bins A & B and all our maps marked up before bed. We just hoped we had put the right food and gear in the correct bin.



Next morning we were bussed to Girraween National Park for the start. Adventure Racing is full of unforeseen problems, but I'm pretty sure no-one anticipated the bus breaking down en route. We arrived at the start line over an hour late and to our surprise had 20 mins to get our gear together, collect our spot trackers and fuel up for the next 99.5 hrs.



Finally the start gun went at 1.30pm and after building up our bikes for stage 2, the field dispersed in all directions to hunt down as few or as many CPs as they saw fit for this leg - the minimum requirement was 1 of the 13 available. Right from this early point the race was interesting because unlike the traditional linear AR format, the team in front was not necessarily the winning team. Many teams opted to collect only 1 or 2 CPs here and get out onto the rest of the course as quickly as possible to ensure they would finish, meanwhile the top teams were trying to collect as many points as possible. The net result of this meant that during the entirety of the race, the fastest and slowest teams were often on the same parts of the course together and it was an unexpected bonus for those teams who are usually last into transition to be through first, while the leaders were finding the TAs almost packed up by the time they got there.



We were stoked with our first sighting of Aussie wildlife in the first 15 mins of the race as kangaroos shot across the road right in front of us! Due to recent fires in the area we didn't see or hear much else but it was a beautiful place - the black tree trunks, ash-ochre earth, bright green new foliage and massive grey granite slabs and boulders creating an amazing natural installation. We hit the first TA just on dark after collecting 5 CPs and were firmly towards the back of the field. Stage 2 was a MTB of around 90km to Boorook Station which included an optional short kayak on Storm King Dam (too cold, too wet and too dark for us).

After a long downhill to Boonoo Boonoo River, we eventually arrived into TA2 in light rain but a little pissed off with ourselves. For some reason we had both ignored the turn off to CP 23 and found ourselves at the bottom of a hill only to have to ride back up to get to the CP. The time we wasted made this 1 point not really worth it!! Because of the wet ground at the TA we opted to push on without sleeping. After 15 mins warming up next to the blazing campfire we headed out onto the huge stage 3 trek. This leg featured a big route choice - north into the hills (shorter, fewer points and hillier), or east into the Cataract river system (longer, more points and flatter). As it turned out, we

were among only a couple of teams that chose this route and as we reached each CP, it was clear we were the first team there. The further we progressed along the river the slower the going seemed to be. We went from reasonably well-defined 'animal' tracks to either super-slippery sheets of granite in the river itself or thick Lantana 'forests' on the edges. Lantana is surely the devil's work and we emerged from the river section cut to shreds and feeling despondent about how long it had taken us. Once we were off the river we picked up the pace on easy to follow tracks and thought we'd be into TA3 in no time. Wrong! Getting from CP44 to the TA was a mission involving steep gullies and spurs and yet more of the dreaded Lantana.

No-one was allowed to leave on stage 4 until midnight and despite thinking we had allowed plenty of time (20hrs) for a sleep before the restart, we arrived 15 minutes after most of the field had departed – we were tired and doubting our strategy to that point.

To our shock a 1.5hr nap next to a fire in TA turned into an accidental 2.5-3hr nap because Anne hadn't quite sussed out how to set the alarm properly on her new cheapie Casio watch! At 36hrs into the race we probably needed the extra shuteye, or at least that's what we were telling ourselves. We got gear and food sorted quickly and headed off again at 4am to trek down the Clarence River. It was an advantage to be following the field at this stage, as they had cleared a bit of a path and we were able to make fairly quick progress as the sun came up and we knocked out the 31km at a pretty good pace and short-cutting some river bends also helped save us time. We'd been on our feet for over 24hrs now and we were both starting to feel some hotspots so we took a break to air our feet and do a little first aid. From there it seemed we'd be on the next stage very soon. However, we got to within 400m of the CP47 and saw the bridge we were aiming for, but somehow managed to make a complete mess of this last section down in a gully in a maze of streams. We finally came to our senses and let our compasses guide us to the road. After 40 mins of stuffing around we were finally at the start of the next kayak leg!!



From this point on, the course was quite linear and there were limited opportunities to pick up extra points, so we headed out on the 21km kayak leg with the mindset of relentless forward momentum. As the sun set the colours along the river were stunning and then the stars came out and seemed brighter than we'd ever seen them. We kayaked into the night, our progress punctuated by portages over very bony rapids every few hundred metres. Towards the end, our headlights were attracting such dense swarms of sandflies that at times it was difficult to see (I kid you not) and certainly not an option to open one's mouth!! There was quite a bit of coughing and spluttering going on but there was nothing we could do to hide. Arriving at TA4 was a relief, more so to be rid of those horrible flies than anything else.

Ahead of us now was around 250km of MTBing over three very substantial ranges, with an optional trek at the 90km mark to break things up. Once again we headed out in the dark at around midnight with much of the field ahead of us. Being reasonably strong MTBers we felt good and made short work of Tryney Mountain taking a 2hr nap just past the summit and headed towards the Toonumbar Dam in the morning sunshine. It was here at last that we ran into another of the Kiwi pairs, Dated Loaf and Pikelet - Rob and Marquita had

just picked up a couple of CPs on the trek and departed for the remainder of the ride to Murwillumbah (160kms away) about an hour ahead of us. Once again we opted to skip this optional leg and press on into the really big hills.



And big they were - 24 hours of ups and downs in which we marvelled at spectacular views, ground out endless ascents (thankfully all rideable albeit in granny gear for what seemed like hours at a time), dodged snakes, spiders and other unmentionables, found Rob and Marquita asleep in a toilet, visited the Pinnacle Hill lookout over the 40km wide and 1000m deep volcanic caldera (stunning, even at night), fell asleep while riding downhill (not recommended) and finally at 7am rode into Tylagum township just as the local store opened to provide a meat pie and chocolate milk that would change our lives.

We had around 20 flattish kms to get to Murwillumbah, but stupidly and maybe because of the choc milk euphoria we were in, we left Tylagum in the wrong direction. It wasn't until after about 15 mins of climbing that we realised. Doh! The bonus was it was all downhill to get back on track!! Not long after CP 84, Team Rogue came through at a steady pace and in usual AR fashion we hooked onto their train and got a pull along – much to the girls' disgust!

Obviously it's not the way pointy end Aussie teams do things. We had a short backtrack to CP85 which we'd missed in the rush and then it was onto the last TA. At this point we were towards the back end of the field, still feeling good but ready for some leg rest. We raced through transition and onto the kayaks for the 40km grind up the Tweed River into an incoming tide.

We discovered that kayaking is a hypnotic action and we found ourselves singing (loudly and tunelessly) to stay awake. It was a race against time but we were unable to resist a couple of extra CPs which included a sneaky portage over a road and through thigh deep mud between CPs 88 & 89 and a mad overland dash to claim the 8 pts at CP90. Thankfully we had a tailwind for the final stretch, and some wind against tide action towards the end of this leg provided some exciting surfing moments.



We arrived at Tweed Heads to discover that the ocean kayak final leg was cancelled and replaced by a trek along the beach to the finish. It was 3.01pm and we had exactly 2 hrs to complete around 15kms, so still in our kayak booties and socks we ran (generous description) the full length of the beach grimly determined not to lose a single hard-won point. We cut it fine, arriving

at 4.54, with under 6 mins to spare - unbeknownst to us, our tracker stopped working a couple of kms from the finish, leaving our dot-watching supporters panicking about whether we'd made it or not.



Huge relief to cross the line, massive sense of satisfaction, deep appreciation of the race organisers and volunteers and the best tasting beer ever!!

We finished with 302 pts in 13th place of the 43 teams entered - 2nd women's team overall, 1st vet women's team and the first of the 2 person teams of all categories. Our Auckland compatriots all finished the full course in the top half of the field with Rob & Marquita only 9 pts back in 14th place overall, so the mood was buoyant for the homeward flight to NZ.

