

Wildfire Raid 2021 Race Report. Derek McKinnon from "Heavy but Mighty"

"So", I asked my teammate Markus, "When was the last time you were in a kayak"?

"I'm not sure", he replied.

"Neither am I", I admitted, "But I think it was 2011".

"Probably the same for me".

You would think this conversation would have happened during planning prior to the 2021 6hr Wildfire Raid. But no, it occurred 3 hours into the race.

The path to such adventures starts in an innocuous way. A simple question, "Hey I see there is an Adventure Raid coming up in a few weeks, do you want to do it".

"Sure", comes the reply. "What's the worst that could happen"?

The training up to that point had been going well. One, 1.5 hour walk per week and I had started adding a 2-3 hour walk for the previous month. A total of 4 hours per week. No problem. Of course, then I fell sick, but I figured a good 3 week taper would work well for me.

In my mind I was most worried about the bike leg. Given I had not been on my bike since my knee operation in October 2019, on Wednesday before the race I pumped up the tyres and rear suspension, put on some lube and did 5 minutes around the yard. Everything was working well, so what was the worst that could happen?

What to take? Friday night I managed to find a gear list we had prepared for the 2009 GeoQuest. All good, I even remembered to add a few extra things needed nowadays like my glasses. Ah, food. That's right, I was going to go shopping today. A quick google fixed everything. Fernvale Woolworths opens at 7am.

And on to the race. The Trek had to be first, and then Kayak or Bike in whatever order we wanted. We chose to leave the kayaking till last, as rain was predicted and if it was heavy, we didn't want to be riding through mud. Most of the points were in the bike leg, but the kayak leg looked like it would give good points per hour. I felt that the course looked easy, even if it was 10m contours, and that the top teams would clear it.

The trek was nice. A flat wander through some open Queensland bush. We decided to go anti-clockwise and to pick them all up. The nav was easy and if you were in doubt there were plenty of elephant trails to help.

1 hour and 10 minutes and it was cleared. Fantastic! I think that is the first time I have cleared a leg in a Raid race.

Then on to the bike. Things started to go downhill on the uphill ride out of the Hash House. There was just nothing in my legs. We chose to go anti-clockwise again. We picked up CP11 and CP10, took the scenic route to CP53, too far right and walked double the distance.

On the ride to CP32 Markus pointed out my back tyre was looking very flat. I forgot to check that before we left. So, Markus pulls out his handy pump, to discover he had never used it on French valves and didn't know how to make it work. If we experimented and got it wrong then I would be out on the course with a completely flat tyre. So we pushed on.

Ben and Sebastian Somerville came to our rescue just before CP32. Lending us their pump and helping us get back on the road. At the end of the day we beat them by 10 points, which doesn't really feel fair, so guys you are welcome to put yourselves above us in the points.

Suddenly there was some strength in the legs, at least for a little while.

We picked up CP54 and were planning on CP45 next, but realised we had ridden too far. Given we had to come back along the same road we decided to leave it for later.

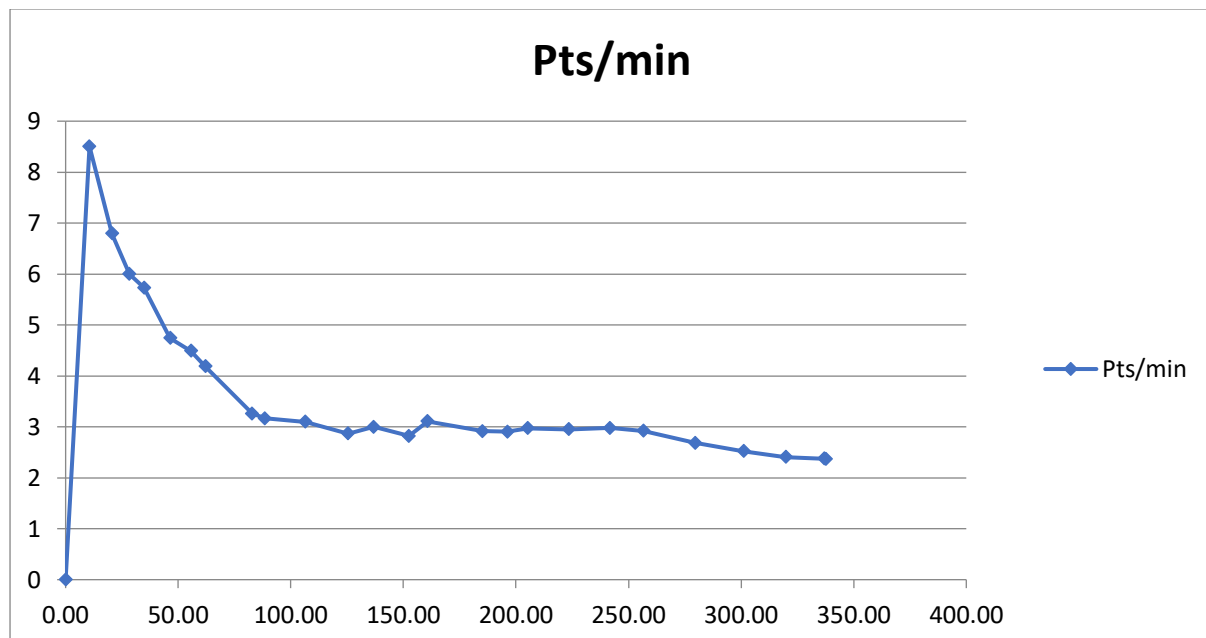
CP28, and CP72 were easy but then the legs started to run out of gas around CP45. The terrain we had ridden on was flat and easy going, but the lack of training was telling.

It was around now that we had our conversation about the Kayaks. Logically we should have pushed for home, just picking up CP34 and CP42 on the way, but the more I thought about it, the more I realised that after 10 years of never being in a kayak, we would be back to being virtual beginners.

So, we stayed on the bike. CP42 and all the way down to CP51. Some teams were there having trouble finding the flag. Markus read the instructions (20m east of track, 50m from shoreline) and rode straight there. Well done Markus!

CP62 on the way back. I looked at some people riding down to it, remembering when I used to have the legs for that. We walked.

I often graph up how many points per minute were achieved by us during the race (see below). I find it interesting that although our speed dropped significantly around the 3 hour mark, our points per minute stayed up until CP62. This indicates that this area was worth the effort.

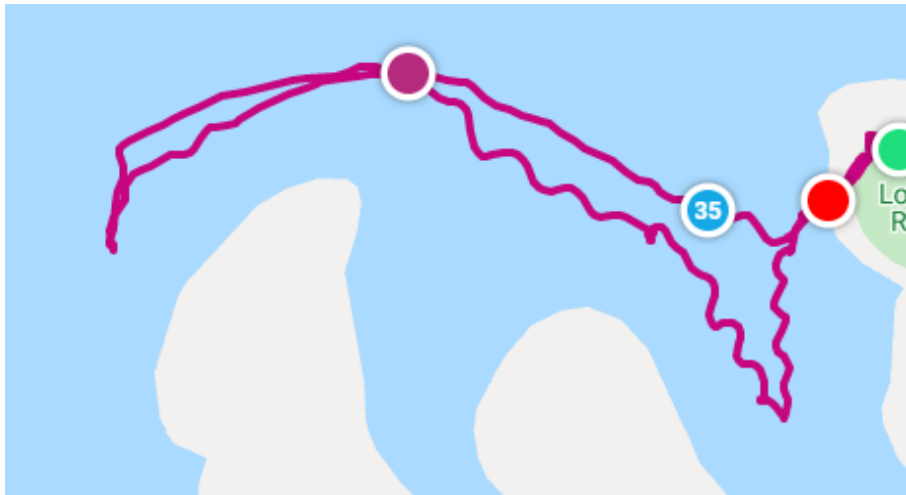


CP39 and then home. Nearly 4 hours on the bike and just 1 hour left to see what we could pick up on the kayak.

As we headed down to the kayak I noticed teams loading bikes on to cars and sitting around chatting. The top teams had cleared it with plenty of time to spare.

Kayaking. Not only had it been 10 years since we sat in a kayak, but we had never used one with a rudder before.

The results were somewhat predictable as shown on my MapMyRun recording (below). First, we went down to CP17 and then back up to CP13. As you can see in the map, we were significantly better after only about 40 minutes in our first ever kayak with a rudder. We found it particularly helps if you adjust the foot pedals for your size. 😊



All in all, it was a wonderful day. Full of adventure and challenges, all of which were overcome as they arose. However, I'm now starting to think that some training might be useful before the next one.