

Team 21: A novice team's perspective

We are not adventure racers. As recreational rogainers we have participated in a couple of short RAID races, so figured we knew mostly what was up. I am not entirely sure how the idea of doing the RAID100 came about (although it definitely wasn't my idea), but having volunteered at an event before, our entry was all too easily secured. As we half-heartedly started training, we realised that Al's pure lead bike from K-mart probably wasn't up to the task. And so began the alarming haemorrhage of cash that continued all the way to the start line. I remain bamboozled by the sheer amount of stuff that is required to complete a race like this! Training activities were erratic and mostly accompanied by circular conversations with a common theme "I wonder how that works?; where do we sleep?; how are we supposed to blow up the packraft?; when will we find the time to build those bike boxes?" and so on. Ignorance is bliss, that's all I can say.

Race week arrives and we cram the (large) car to the rafters and get to HQ nice and early. Over Sat night dinner in the common area, we hear a conversation at the neighbouring table about a dual-ended spoon and toothbrush. This space (weight?) saving innovation had attracted much excitement and admiration from the others at the table. I look at Al and my fear levels creep up a little; is the weight of my disposable toothbrush with full-length handle going to be my undoing? "Think I had better go and unpack my electric toothbrush" he says to me.

Day 1 was fantastic. The great weather and coastal location suited us beautifully, and we really enjoyed the coasteering. Although, the final slog up the Clarence against a roaring tide was entirely forgettable. Summed up nicely at one point by Team Coastal Nomads as they glided cheerfully past "Nowhere to hide out here...". Super relieved to exit the kayaks, even if it was into knee deep mud, we knuckled down to our first transition experience. And what a shemozzle it was. Transitioning really is the silent skill of adventure racing. Anyway, what seemed like years later we were on the bikes and heading for the 3am cut-off.



Day 2 was also a highlight. We were very disappointed by the loss of the technical navigational element, but still really enjoyed hiking in such a beautiful National Park. Back in transition just on dark we moved onto the bike stage with excited chatter about finally being able to tick the BNT off our to-do list. Permanently. How unloved can a trail network be? Anyway, finally down the range for a short kip and on with the rest of the bike stage the following dawn. Despite the shiny new bikes we were very slow on this leg, which unravelled our plans to get to CP60 before the dark zone.

Moderately disappointed, we stayed at TA4 and went off on the mini rogaine around the property, which was lovely. My disappointment was quickly replaced by relief (and a healthy dose of fear) later while listening to the tales of rafting carnage from rescued teams.

Day 4 dawned and the moment of truth arrived. Having conquered blowing up the raft, we wrestled it through the world's narrowest gate without popping it and slithered down to the river. Next challenge, getting in. Did you hire a kid's one, Al asks me as he is trying to wriggle into the back seat. God, maybe I did I think, I definitely hired the cheapest one I could find, but no time to reply as we were swept off towards the first rapid in time to watch the team of 4 in front of us get broadsided and rolled. Somehow, we shot safely between the drybags, bodies and empty rafts and so began a long day of trying to stay alive. In retrospect it was very fun. Mark and Garran from Coastal Nomads buddied up with us for safety in numbers and were an absolute pleasure to be around. We had such a fun day with them, so thank you guys, you are two of the nicest (and funniest) blokes on the planet!

The final hours passed in a daze of wet feet and desperation for it to be over. At one point on the final kayak leg a team shot past and called out to Al, "mate, you are so tired you have your paddle upside down!" "Aghh, yes, totally shattered" he calls back flipping his paddle over. Some seconds later when we are alone again, I hear him mutter to himself in bewilderment "who knew they had a right way up?" To which I cannot resist pointing out the logo on the blade is probably a dead giveaway for this. Some paddling lessons probably wouldn't go astray for us. We were first on the river on Friday morning, and nearly last off at the other end, but we got there.



Finally, a big thank you to Liam and the volunteers for an epic job well done in an ever-changing environment.