

# Rouge 24: The Rogue less travelled

**From the best seller** “where the f\*ck is team 43?”

– by team “**Spirit of ANZAC\_Tiger Adventure**” (Kieran Harrison & Scott Mingl – team 43)

**11am** – 11:05am. Racing has started. Video’s and pictures coming.

**8:56pm.** “Half the teams back from the Northbrook trek. Team 43 has not shown up at the TA on their bikes and we are trying to track them down”

**9:27pm.** “We’ve had contact with team #43. They’ve had a puncture and took a wrong turn. They are on their way to TA22 now. 10.5 hours in, that’s a picture of perseverance”

**9:30pm.** “Response from team #43 Spirit of ANZAC Tiger Adventure to our concerned text messages on their absence on the course: “So does that mean we are in the lead?”

**7:12am.** “A progress update on the teams. All but one team has returned from the Stage 3 bike leg – Spirit of ANZAC (43)”

## – Rouge 24 live blog

So apparently we have a story to share. The question most people were asking throughout the race wasn’t “who is in the lead” it was “where the heck are team 43?”. And so we will share our story; one of excessive optimism in both check points and navigation skills, and a little bit of guts and determination. And by guts I mean upset guts, by determination I mean we say we are going to do it, we will, even if that meant 3.5hours of hiking with our bikes in hand, up and down what seemed like a never ending Everest of hills, what we didn’t know at the time was that instead of heading South toward checkpoint 7 for a casual 80 points, we were trekking East across a neglected township break clustered with 25m contour lines (hence the neglect)... It may not be the most seamless journey but sometimes it’s about the adventure isn’t it? Even if we biked for 23 hours on a course that involves kayaking and trekking right? Enjoy the read.

Rouge 24 was to be our first adventure race beyond a Paddy Pallin race in NSW. We wanted more, and so we investigated into the world of adventure racing and bumped into a friendly adventure race advocate by the name of Trevor Mullins. Our first mistake. The trouble with Trevor is that his buoyant & kind-hearted demeanor conceals an underlying addiction to speed and pain. Clarifying the terms; speed (measure of pace) and pain (fatiguing body parts), terms when combined together aren’t typically enjoyed by the masses. Upon speaking to him, this demeanor loured us into a false sense of security when it came to taking on such a race, so we signed up in March, swept all elements of worry under the rug and began training.

A couple weeks out from the race we had our second training run together, smashing out a run & bike over 1000m of elevation, covering around 30km. We were shattered, but chuffed at the same time. This only meant one thing, WE WERE RACE READY! (excessive optimism). We decided that Scott would be our navigator seeing he had a background in the army (a couple placements peacekeeping in the Soloman Islands – some mighty navigational demands no doubt). My second warning sign (post bumping into Trevor) was another insane adventure racer by the name of Liz

Woodgate, yes she is just as crazy as Trevor (seeing a trend here), the weekend before the race we went for a ride south of Sydney to the national park, we got chatting about the race and she queried what I had lined up in terms of equipment, I pointed to my \$20.00 bike light purchased from KMART at 20% off I thought it was a ripper deal, she grimaced and said "uh ah, you are going to borrow my headlight". I was a little taken back by the distaste she showed toward my prized bike light, but seeing she was so giving, I let it slide, I took the advice and the headlight as well. It got me thinking however, "why such a big deal is being made of this race, maybe its going to be harder than what we think?". I guess we would have to wait and see.

Warning sign 3 just before the start of the race: our chief navigator's compass was broken. And we had only figured that out as the announcer counted down from 10...9...8...7...f\*ck...6...5...lets use mine...4...3...2...1 its business time. Scotty and I were off at a cracking pace, heading SE from basecamp to checkpoint 2, whilst about 95% of the field went in another direction (I guess you can say that's warning sign 4). Our plans were locked in and course was plotted, we were to pick up 2, then pick up as many bike checkpoints as possible as we head NE then east across the map to the bigger bike check points, little did we know that this was a poor decision.

It was a clear, sunny and typically scorching Brisbane day, we were taking in a lot of water and gasping for air as we battled through the track across checkpoints 3, 5, 8 we had covered a lot of ground already and at a good pace, it was at this point around 2pm in which things took a turn for the worse. Scott was having issues with his stomach only an hour into the race and to make matters worse was having severe muscle cramps due to the new bike shoe set up, being used for the first time. And just to make matters worse he inflicted a side wall puncture to his rear tire. It took an hour for us to fix as the pump wasn't working and we hadn't used the inflator valve before, when it worked it was awesome!

We put some extra patches on the outside of the wall for good measure and were off again! Going at a slower pace for the next few hours as we didn't want another puncture, and with Scotty in severe pain that was our only choice. At that point a smart person would have turned back, Scott on the other hand wanted to push on without a complaint. I didn't really hear the extent of the cramps until he started rolling his legs over a step through log at checkpoint 10, some gasps of pain followed! By this time it was 3.30pm and we started to think about how far we had to go to get to the TA based on our course, something like three times distance we had just completed. As soon as there was a slight increase in intensity the cramps would come on again, causing us to go at half the pace, which only made it harder. We calculated that by the time we got to check point 12 (another ~11km to CP 12) we would have added another 3 hours already on to our expected 9 hour bike to the TA.



That would have been correct if we didn't make a wrong turn! Yes we took an accidental early left through Layhys break leading us to the opposite side of Gold Creek Reservoir where we needed to be. At this point we were pretty desperate, I had found a single track off the main trail as we searched to do anything other than back track, it looked like it led along the reservoir edge we decided to take the gamble if we were to get there before nightfall. And so we did, we were ecstatic taking some selfies in celebration soaking up another 30mins, we took our first break and took a chance to watch the sun go down, not a bad site at all and a little reward



Interestingly, we had not accounted for riding in the dark and therefore had no lights other than the trusty KMART light. The only light to illuminate us for the next 8 hours through the bush. The fun had just begun. The light now had faded as we made our way by road to the Jones Break Track. The other issue was Scott not having a light at all; the only option was my microscopic red rear LED bike light.

If my light only lit up about 4 foot in front of us, Scott's would have been much worse, and I quote "I cannot see sh\*t" but he continued on, lodging the light between his teeth so at least he had some time to react by completing quick scans to the left and right to avoid oncoming rocks, logs, and so forth crossing our paths. If only we had packed Liz's head lights! Despite this and the continued cramping, we were in high spirits and off to get our next check points, after all there was a 80 pointer coming up! Before we got onto the eastern bike track leading to checkpoint we bumped into a lady who had just come off the track. She said to us it was a very steep incline up to where we were heading and that it was pitch black, she looked at us like we were nut jobs. She didn't know the half of it. We thanked her for the information and pressed forward, within about 800m I came off my bike hitting a rock I didn't see to the left of the track. Shortly after that our KMART light pulled through lighting up checkpoint number 14 at the watercourse junction, on our way to 18 we stopped to search in the wrong spot for another 45 minutes, we then took Trevor's advice "if you cannot find the checkpoint, it is likely you are in the wrong spot, the Rogue team do not hide the checkpoints, stop looking and move on" he was right, a few kms later we found 18 at around 7.30pm. This is when we saw our first competitors, I actually saw lights and heard murmurs as I came around one of the final bends and yelled excitedly "SCOTT...WE HAVE HUMAN'S" all I heard back was muffled groaning sounds (Scott trying to speak but couldn't due to the light in his mouth!)

**Final push for the TA:** It was at this point where we had no food left except a couple peanuts (literally) and within about 1km I was out of water – from the 5L I packed.

It must have been about 8pm at this stage, 9 hours from our leaving time, by our navigation assumptions we were supposed to have been rolling into the TA at this point ready to eat some nice fresh subway we had packed into the supply box (little did we know we were still 6 hours away). Finally, we had made it to the road which picked us up a bit, I had a few handfuls of trail mix so we divided it up between each other. We decided that without water this was going to be tough, therefore we going to have to find someone to give us some. After a couple km along the road we came to a warmly lit house which gave off a pretty good vibe, we biked up the path, jumped off our bikes, unlocked the gate door like a creepy robber in the night and made our way to the front door... knock knock...(please don't let there be a dog!), the door swung open, but I couldn't see anyone. I then looked downwards, and there she was, a little old lady who had been nattering to her friend on the phone looking at us in a very peculiar way, probably wondering what the strange stench was as well (sweat and blood). She kindly offered to fill our drink bottles up, then Scott's bladder, then mine. I felt sorry to have disturbed her gossip session but it didn't seem to bother her, we thanked her, armed with a handful of peanuts and 4L of water each, we were in high spirits and off again. (note\* send flowers to 847 Mount Nebo road).

**No photos just hard work:** It felt like an age grinding up the hills at snail's pace, they were much steeper than anticipated and without lights had to constantly jump onto the scrub on the side to avoid cars clipping us which slowed our momentum even more. Our final food (half the bonus cliff shot blok we were given) was consumed and we smashed it up the hill to checkpoint 16 around 10.30pm, here we were starting to bump into a lot of the "smart" teams that were coming in the opposite direction, post the TA. We then continued onto checkpoint 17, and had some trouble. Without food we were not functioning well and rode on past the checkpoint. By the time we realized this was about 1km out, Scott was far too exhausted at this stage to go back, so I grabbed the map, we cut off his wrist band and I headed back solo, we had stopped at a street junction about a couple km away and Scott said it was 750metres south of that so off I went. I don't know whether it was poor communication between both of us or simply the lack of glucose to our brains but again it was the wrong junction, I simply couldn't find it, frustratingly biking up and back the roads adding another 45 minutes to our time. I got back to Scott with bad news, we then reviewed the checkpoint again, Scott with 45 minutes sleep in his emergency blanket made more sense of it this time and decided to join me to find it. And so we did by 12:24am!

We passed a team who asked us “are you team 43” everyone’s trying to contact you, so we turned our phones on and made contact with the ladies at the TA to tell them we were ok. We brainstormed a funny text around us thinking we were in the lead, as the blog reads, we were more worried about the ladies being angry at us however they were great, we said we were on our way and so we made tracks. About 5 minutes later we bumped into Shaun from the tiger team who had pulled out earlier and was taking others back to camp, he gave us an exit option to follow him back to camp. The look on Scott’s face looked worrying as this triggered his interest. After a couple more sentences we found out that if we go with him without checking into the TA, we lose all of our points from the day and also miss out on eating our subway! That was not going to happen, so we thanked him for the offer and took off to the TA. Choosing to skip past CP 19 as all we were thinking of at this stage was our soggy subway. The ladies came and checked on us, informing us the police were out and we should take a couple of their headlights which we were happy to do, Scott had his LED on the back of his bike now and my light on the front, giving his jaw a bit of a rest. We received a bonus handful of chips which we were very happy to see and again we trudged on uphill. Finally after a few more hours, we reached the TA at 2am.

The ladies were one of the highlights of the night so bubbly at such an unreasonable hour, and especially so with all the crap we had been pulling throughout the day! I was pretty keen to get eating as I still believed we could make it to the kayak leg on time which closed at 5am, we heard there was a quicker leg back which took about 1-2 hours to get back to camp. So it was possible. Then Scott finally cracked saying “mate, when we get back to that camp the only place I am going to is straight to the car for some sleeping” plan B was that Trevor may still be there so we could at least have a go on the kayaks or maybe Scott will be lively enough to do the little trek leg around camp for some final extra points. I wish we had the ability to make the decision but unfortunately we didn’t.

**The final wrong turn:** After about 25 minutes we were back on the bikes, the girls told us that they were surprised that we had so many checkpoints so far across the bike leg, we knew they were trying to get our moral up and it did. We were back to optimistic thinking, and off to collect that checkpoint 19 we bypassed earlier and we did. With our new super powerful headlights mounted to our helmets we felt unstoppable, 8 hours with a light between your teeth does that to you when making the comparison!

We found the route that would lead us back home pretty easy, until we found ourselves weaving a part of the track we didn’t think existed leading toward CP 7 (this was because we were further back than we thought – see stars on map) so we back tracked back to the junction we passed previously and took that track. We had to get off our bikes several times in the first couple hundred metres and climb over fallen trees, logs and branches. I told Scott I had a bad feeling about this and that the Rogue team surely wouldn’t let us bike down these tracks at night, Kieran “I have a very bad feeling about this one, are you sure?” Scott “100%”, I also found some relatively fresh orange peels and that was enough for us to assume it was the right way, haha I don’t think we will make good trackers anytime soon. We didn’t take Trevors advice here either after not being able to find the saddle checkpoint, we didn’t question the track enough. So we continued. The uphills were sooo steep, we were pushing the mountain bikes above our heads, desperately trying to find our footage as we tripped our way up the rubble. The downhills were worse, too steep to bike down as the tree littered rollercoaster track quickly whipped back into an uphill gradient (giving bikers no chance to ride down) on top of the lose rubble beneath us made it harder to gain traction as we went descended, we had to carry the bikes as the steepness would have sent us and the bikes bouncing down the hill. This happened non-stop for 3 hours. I put my head down and just went for it. After getting to the top I waited for Scott as I did, I had made the conclusion it was wrong route. When he arrived I suggested we turn around. He said he would rather cut his arm off remarking “it has to go somewhere” so we continued. Luckily at this stage the gradients had relieved a bit and we finally found a road. We knew this road quite well, we were on it about 6 hours ago. There were two options here 1) go road then track back to the camp (faster but a

harder route) or 2) go road, around 53km back to camp. We decided road was the best and safest option considering our navigation history and just went for it. It felt like forever as we went up and down hills, around long steep bends and at points going up to 68km's an hour and others 6km/hour. The sun started to come out , another nice but hot day, we were actually in pretty high spirits trying different biking techniques as we attacked the hills and wondering how far we had gone.

Unfortunately there were no checkpoints to get so that's all we had. Having food and water on us was always a good thing, my body felt pretty fresh strangely enough, we were just generally annoyed that we hadn't been able to make the other legs. When we made it back to home base, it was around 10.30am the race to get back to claim our bike leg points had been won by us. We still had time to have a go on the Trek around the campsite for some extra points, I looked to Scott with some unrealistic demands, Scott was understandably disinterested, I asked if I could do it alone and was about to run to the car and get my running shoes when I received the bad news, without Scott I wasn't allowed. After all it was a team event, and that's where we ended it, two guys, their first time, found wanting due to a bit of underdone navigation and a little excess optimism toward 25m contour lines. We were happy we pushed through to around 23 hours of almost non-stop biking in tough conditions, I was proud of us, especially the mental strength of my pal Scott who never gave up and never complained or turned back even when he was offered it on a platter. Now that's what I call guts and determination.

Sitting there at the end watching everyone come in was just as cool, not one team came in without a smile ear to ear, the smile reflected 24 hours of adventure not 24 hours hard yak. Its about the experience, from the team that comes in first to the team that comes in last (in our books being out there is just as good as winning). An adventure is exactly what was had. A blast.

So the question I guess you are asking now is "will they do something like this again?" Our response: See you at GEOQUEST! Thank you to Trevor and Liz for all your help!

Time to join the crazy's!

Check out our route across the two maps (not the road route went outside the map so I added the google route for context) :