

### 10<sup>th</sup> February 2008

The Website said:

*“XPD is Australia’s own expedition length adventure race. Up to 80 teams of four competitors from Australia and overseas will trek, mountain bike and kayak in this world renowned expedition. Edition 4 of XPD will span 800km of the Australian High Country and see teams taking in some of Australia’s highest mountains; white water paddling on turbulent rivers fed by melting winter snow; navigating through alpine forests of snowgum and tall sub-alpine mountain gums and visiting historic gold rush towns.*

*“XPD is open to mixed, all male or all female teams of four. The exact course is kept secret until 24hrs before the start. Then with much excitement and anticipation, teams are provided a course booklet and their race maps. The course booklet contains the location of each of the race checkpoints. Once teams start, racing is 24 hours per day; teams choose when and where they will sleep. Teams will be permitted up to 10 days to complete the expedition.*

*“In the spirit of a true expedition, teams will be unsupported with their equipment, pre-packed in plastic trunks, being moved to various points on the course by the race organisers.*

With an invitation like that what else could we do but pay up and start training? The “we” being Team **Still Thinking About It-Swive Shipping** comprised of Nic Watson from Monpi Coffee, Yosh Reilly from New Guinea Coffee, Tea and Spice and Grant Jephcott from New Guinea Highlands Coffee Exports.

### 17<sup>th</sup> November 2008

**10.30am** - We have just been handed our race bibs (#13) and introduced to the other 30 teams competing. It’s been a long 8 months to get here – Training, stressing, spending, eating, interviewing, stressing, spending, eating, training, stressing, spending, interviewing, training, eating and travelling – but we are here now with our fourth team member, Sergey Kurov, an experienced Adventure Racer from Russia. (Found him working for Telstra in Melbourne)

### 18<sup>th</sup> November 2008

**5.00pm** - Things have moved quickly and before we knew it our food boxes, bikes and paddle equipment were packed and handed to the logistic teams. We have been handed our race maps, had our first snowball fight (as only tropical inhabitants will do – scornfully watched by Sergey) and proven to the organisers that we can find our way around the Thredbo car park, stay afloat in a river and can treat hyperthermia and snake bite. Tonight we will have a detailed look at the maps, and work out what we are in for.

### 19<sup>th</sup> November 2008

**2.00pm** – We are navigating our way through the thick fog and rain on the rocky outcrops of Mt Buffalo in the Victorian High Country. The race is finally underway and it’s good to be in the fresh air following a 6hr bus trip from Thredbo. (*Leg 1 30km Orienteering - completed*).



**11.40pm** – It is bucketing rain and we are pushing our bikes (who said bikes were made for riding?) for the umpteenth time up a vertical, muddy hill and its freezing. I thought hell was meant to be hot.

### 20<sup>th</sup> November

**5.30am** – Who would have thought you could fall asleep riding a bike, we can see the town of Harrietville now which means we can finally put the bikes away. Last night really hit us hard; we didn’t see that one coming from the course description or the maps – 9hrs to do 65km (*Leg 2 –completed*).

**11.25am** – The view from Mt Feathertop is all of about 6 meters, due to sleet. The climb up was tough but uneventful following a slow transition at Harrierville that included hot chocolate, pies and coffee from the corner shop. We had a quick stop in one of the huts to get out of the cold but it quickly became too crowded so we decided to move on for Falls creek.

**9.50pm** – Just finished a Burgundy stew, from the only restaurant open in Falls Creek. The trip from Mt Feathertop was actually enjoyable as we warmed up but our tiredness led to a navigational error adding about 2 hours to our trek. Have decided to take 3 hours sleep here on the floor of the check point station after being on our feet since 2pm yesterday. A few other teams doing the same, which adds to the bouquet of the room. The hand dryer in the toilets has become a focal point for drying out kit.



#### **21<sup>st</sup> November**

**11.35am** We are on the top of Mt Bogong, following a 1.30am start in absolutely freezing conditions where we trekked across the 'tundra' from Falls Creek. Had breakfast of cold pasta, in the frost this morning. Views have been spectacular today and we are looking forward to getting off our feet and going for a paddle soon. Blisters are starting to affect our team now. Was hilarious watching team mates stumbling around, literally sleep walking, catching themselves inches before falling off a cliff or similar (*Leg 3 – 85km trek – almost completed*)

**3.30pm** – You wouldn't believe it the first part of the kayak leg has been cancelled due to dangerous currents on the Kiewa River so we have to walk another 5kms down river. In our condition this seems like a thousand miles. To make matters worse there is an evening curfew on the river so even when we do get going we have to hop out of the water at 6pm and trek the rest of the way to Keegan's Bridge. The hallucinations from lack of sleep really took hold on this stretch. The paddle section went well and even allowed one member to corrupt an action photo by striking a vanity pose. One kayak got stuck on a rock in a rapid causing the kayak to fill with water – unfortunately we discovered that our packs were not as water tight as a Swires shipping container. Wet gear again....

**11.50pm** – We are finally sitting down under Keegan's Bridge as it's raining again. (*Leg 4 32km Kayak – Completed*) Decided we need a decent rest (4hrs) so we will sleep until 4am and before we head out on the huge 210km mountain bike leg.

#### **22<sup>nd</sup> November**

**6pm** – We have been at mid camp in Tingalpa at the head of the Murray River for a couple of hours. This morning we got up, assembled our bikes, hoed into our breakfast and started to head out from Keegan's when we were stopped by the organisers and advised that there was 100km/winds and a metre of snow expected in the high country over the next 24hours. So all competitors were transferred to Tingalpa for 24hrs.



### **23<sup>rd</sup> November**

**6pm** – Finally on the go again. Mountain biking this time. The last 24hrs has allowed the swelling in our feet to go down; we have caught up on sleep and packed in the carbohydrates. Not to mention we snuck in a pint or 2 at the local – **Sponsored by Daniell Cowley our PNG training partner**. Food boxes have been re-jigged for the expected 2-3day 'sprint' to the finish.

**10pm** – Should have put another set of handles at the back of the bike. Can't believe how much pushing we have had to do. (*Leg 7 65km MTB – nearly there*).

### **24<sup>th</sup> November**

**10am** - - We have just finished an amazing orienteering leg in 8hrs and gained 9 places due to Mr. Kurov's canny navigational skills. This was no mean feat considering we started in the Maragle State Forest at 2am amongst a foot of snow. (*Leg 8 25km Orienteering – Completed*).

**1.30pm** – Just hit the snow belt again following a rapid downhill and a monster uphill from the Tumut River. Crossing that was an adventure in its self, 4 people, 4 bikes, 4 backpacks on a K2 inflatable and a stick for a paddle. From here we have a sealed road down to the ghost town of Kiandra and on to Lake Eucumbene.

**5.30pm** – Absolutely wrecked, that leg from Kiandra to Eucumbene just went on and on and on – more sleep riding at 45km/hr. (*Leg 9 & 10 60km MTB – Completed*)

### **25<sup>th</sup> November**

**3.30am** – Have you ever put on a wet wetsuit in minus temperatures? We left the transition area at 8.45 last night in cold conditions paddled for a couple of hours when our navigator fell asleep paddling. It was raining and the temperature was dropping so we all decided to rest in our 2man tent (very cosy). Hopefully we will be able to pick out the land marks in the twilight before the sun comes up.



**8.50am** – Just finished portaging our kayaks for 3km uphill and are assembling our bikes for the ride up to Charlottes Pass. (*Leg 11 30km Kayak – completed*).

**6.35pm** – At Perishers Ski resort, the booklet said “Significant altitude gain and loss on this leg”. No kidding. Started that nasty habit of falling asleep on the bike again so we had to sneak in a 20minute power nap at midday. Getting really sick of the sweet energy foods now. (*Leg 12 65km MTB – all but completed*).



**11.25pm** – On top of Australia, Mt Kosciusko, and the snow drifts up here have been deep and made the walking a bit hard. Also had a couple falls on the iced up board walks, but the end is near

**26<sup>th</sup> November**

**1.26am** – Sitting in the lounge chairs of Thredbo Entertainment Centre eating cold pizza and Champagne – life never felt so good. Missed out on coming down on the chairlift from Kosciusko but one of us came down backward to reduce the pain of damaged tendons – fun to watch. (*Race Completed*)

**9.30am** – Having breakfast at the Thredbo hotel in bare feet and reflecting on an amazing week *as a team*. That aspect alone is a stand out as almost half the teams did not finish as a foursome.

Still Thinking About It – Swire Shipping (Team 13) came in 12<sup>th</sup> overall and 4<sup>th</sup> in the all male category.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Swire Shipping for their generous support of our folly and we also look forward to a mutually beneficial relationship in the coffee transport business this year.

