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## ARWC 2011 Race Report

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### Adventure Racing World Championships 2011 – Geoquest XPD – Burnie, Tasmania

ARWC 2011 Report by Nicholas Mulder

Team Cyanosis reached the town of Burnie, Tasmania after a two-day long haul from South Africa. For the team members, it involved 3 or 4 flights (depending whether you lived on the south coast or in Joburg), 3 or 4 baggage claims and rechecks, and 3 or 4 excess baggage payments. That was the easier part. The real trouble was getting four fit and healthy individuals to the start line. We did it, just, sort of....

This was the fourth AR World Champs that Cyanosis has competed in, with the team result each year improving steadily. We didn't finish the full course back in New Zealand in 2005, then in Portugal in 2009 we were 22nd. This was followed up with 13th in Spain in 2010. Our goal was to continue on this trajectory. The final team composition saw John Collins and Jeanette Walder (aka Bubbles) joining myself and Nathan Thompson for the race. Bubbles was a late replacement for Hanlie Booyens, who just 2 weeks before the race start, had to pull out of the team when she suffered a freak injury, tripping on an easy training jog and tearing the cruciate ligament in her knee. Bubbles immediately stepped into the breach when asked, despite the race taking place shortly after her wedding. On the bright side, she did get to go on honeymoon with 3 guys to New Zealand. Just a pity that none of them was her new husband!

In the end it all worked out. Although only myself and Nathan had ever raced an expedition race together, all the team members had extensive racing histories and had all raced against each other at the highest level on a regular basis. We also got reasonably lucky with excess baggage charges compared to some other international teams. The rest went according to plan. We got to Burnie, the start and finish venue of the World Champs in due course. We settled comfortably into our hotel, which was perfectly situated opposite the best supermarket in town, where we did all our last minute food shopping for the race. Race registration, kit checks, briefings and race box packing and map preparation went smoothly and then we were waiting for the start of the race at 9am on a cool windy morning on Burnie's main beach.

The AR World Champs race course was going to be a 733km, 5 – 10 day odyssey through some of the most remote terrain that the island of Tasmania had to offer. After starting with a 17km sea paddle, we'd soon be faced with mountainous terrain with dense forest, dangerous snakes, raging rivers and cold and wet weather. From the town of Burnie on Tasmania's north shore, the course would head south for the first half of the race, with lots of trekking, mountain biking and lake kayaking legs. After reaching the south-west coastline, the race would again turn north, with coasteering, mountain biking and river paddling through more jungle and coastal vegetation taking us north and then east back to Burnie. Cyanosis had packed enough food into our support boxes for 6 days of racing, but we were hoping to come across some civilization every now and again where we could walk into a shop or café. 80 teams from around the world had made it to Tasmania for the race, including almost all of the world's top teams. We had decided that we were going for a Top 10 placing, believing that the non-stop, unsupported expedition style of this race, together with the tough rugged terrain suited our team very well.

On your marks...

The start was spectacular, with 80 teams, each with 2 kayaks (one a red plastic and the other a yellow inflatable). We turned east for the 17km paddle, which thankfully had a mostly tail wind. Every now and again, there was a slight cross wind, which made steering difficult. Although cool and partly overcast, this was actually superb weather by Tasmanian standards. The fair weather would be a notable feature for most of the race. In the days preceding the start, we had seen how bad the weather could get, with some heavy downpours on some nights and strong westerly winds coming off the Southern Ocean. Paddling is not one of Cyanosis' strengths, so we were quite happy to settle down in a position that must

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## Latest Events

- 24.09.2011 Merrell Spruit Tra...
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- 31.10.2011 Adventure Racing W...

## Who's Online

We have 13 guests online

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have been late 10's or early 20', blissfully unaware of a recent news headline in the local paper that said reported on a 6m Great White sighting off the coast of Burnie. Oh well. We had one check point en route before a transition at the town of Penguin (ah, cute). From there we trekked of into the Dial Mountain Range, but not before visiting a Clay Pigeon shooting range.

John, despite not having picked up a gun since his tweens, was our designated sharp shooter. One member from each team had 5 opportunities to hit the targets or face a 10 minute sit-down time penalty. We weren't expecting much (I was actually about to get some food out and repack my backpack) when John surprised us by knocking two out of the sky. So much for a quick rest... We were off again in about 14th position, having made up some good time since the kayak. This first section of a 20km trek through the mountains allowed me the opportunity to get used to the maps. The quality was poor, mainly due to printing, but also a lot of detail wasn't shown compared to other maps that we've raced on from around the world. Nevertheless, it was the same for everyone, so I settled down with them and got my eye in very quickly. We also got used to the terrain very quickly. Although this was a Eucalyptus forest (with some trees of absolutely incredible size), the bush was a lot denser than we expected. We stuck to the paths wherever possible, and took the shortest, most direct ways into the checkpoints that were scattered around the mountains. We nailed most of them, moving our way up the field until we were around 8th place, running in the illustrious company of some of the best teams in the world, including current World Champs, Team Buff from Spain and a multitude of top teams from Sweden. We picked up our bikes for the first time in the early afternoon, having made quick work of the mountain trekking. Our second transition wasn't as fast as it could have been, but then this was going to be a long race, with most of the shorter legs on day 1. We completed a quick 20km bike leg on tar roads that took us to one of the special highlights of the race, a caving section. Mind you head...

The caving was timed-out. Team were given 1 hour in which to complete the caving section, a fair period that ensured that there was no racing and thus any accidents in the cave. The first few CPs were in the 'tourist' side of the cave, with nice walk ways and spectacular formations. Then we dived into an underground stream and crawled along it into the 'adventure' side of the cave. This involved some freezing cold water, lots of tight corners and a bit of searching, but we made it out, even with about 20 minutes to spare. We used this time to give our bikes a once over and get some more food into us. We checked headlights as well, as it would be dark in a few hours time. Our objective was to get as much of the next 50km mountain bike done in the remaining daylight.

The cycle took us onto the first of many forest tracks. With the heavy rains in recent days, these started to get noticeably muddy in places. The navigation was also quite intricate, with some forestry and mining tracks not shown on the map. We made good head way before dark, getting caught out on the last technical but fun downhill. With bike lights on, it was only another hour to transition at Leven Canyon on a gravel road. We disassembled and packed away our bikes back into the bike boxes and then dug into our support box for our first proper meal, tinned pasta and meat. Unfortunately it had to be eaten cold.

The Expedition starts...

Leaving Leven Canyon, we started out on the first big stage of the race, a 60km trek over the mountains and down another canyon that we expected would take us about 18 hours. In the end, we did it in about 20, one of the better times for a team. We left the transition in about 14th place and immediately crossed the lower end of Leven Canyon, setting out on a small long-distance hiking trail. A few CPs saw us walking around in wet streams and climbing under rocks to enter a small cave before the trail started climbing, from about 300m above sea level to the 1200m altitude of Black Bluff. With the altitude, the weather worsened, with a light drizzle in the bitterly cold conditions. Due to excess baggage problems, we'd travelled to Tasmania very light, and we paid for it here with a lack of enough warm gear. What we did have, got put on very quickly. We also encountered Team Quechua from France for the first time. It would be the first of many, many encounters during the next few days as the two teams kept passing and re-passing each other.

The navigation on the high ground near Black Buff was once again critical. With few paths, sub-zero temperatures and a strong westerly wind, you didn't want to spend more time hanging around than needed. Within hours of us passing, there was snow lying on the ground. The vegetation was tough going as well, very reminiscent of the top of the Drakensberg back home, just soggy. We pushed on, more or less following the best route across and off the mountains, finding the check points without problem. Just around dawn, we located the last of the check points for this part of the course, a forest vegetation boundary, and got to see the landscape for the first time. It was absolutely stunning, with scattered eucalyptus forest and soggy moorland bisected by brooks in full spate. We got to see some of our first wildlife during the race, a few wallabies hopping around.

Sunrise brought the usual questions from the rest of the team.... How much further? The answer didn't cheer them up. The terrain in general was very slow going and it was about to get worse. We crossed the only real mark of civilization since starting this trek, the tarred surface of the Cradle Mountain Road and then proceeded into even more remote country. The jungle section was about to begin. Separating the Ferns from the Trees...

From the tar road, we started following a track which steadily became smaller and smaller, first a footpath then what could

only be described as an animal track. Surprisingly, this was depicted on the map. A lot of careful navigation and path finding was required here, as we almost lost the track on numerous occasions. We managed to sneak past Quechua and another team at some point as they explored alternative options in the dense jungle.

Our end goal was Reynolds Falls and the start of the race's rope work section. The track was tough going and we struggled to even get 2.5km every hour. Towards the end it speeded up as we descended towards the fall, only to find out as we checked in that the abseil beside the falls had to be cancelled due to a swollen river. Interestingly enough, that we were about to start canyoneering / kloofing down the bottom of this river didn't seem to be a problem! The biggest surprise for the team however, was that we signed into the checkpoint at the abseil in 7th position. We had started the trek in about 14th, but were only aware of passing 2 teams. As usual, even though we had thought the last few hours had been tough, so had the other teams.

A marked route let us down into the Vale River canyon just downstream of the falls. Quechua caught us at the bottom and the two teams worked together to get across the first section of the canyon, rocky pools with strong water flow, including two swims through ice-cold (about 8°C) water, about 10 and 40m in length. We stripped to a minimum of clothing so that we had something dry to put on when the canyon opened up a bit. It looked like this would take a while, with steep cliffs on either side downriver as far as we could see. At least we could count ourselves lucky enough to reach this section in the early afternoon; pity the teams who need to swim at night.

This kloofing section will definitely go down in memory as one of the most incredible, on a par with some of South Africa's canyons on the Wild Coast. The main difference was that even by Wild Coast standards, this was remote. The rocks in the water were extremely slippery, so we stayed to the edges where possible and soon started hacking our way through the forests on the river edges. As usual, the grass was always greener on the other side and we ended up crossing the river innumerable times. Every time we thought we had made a good route choice, we would see Quechua either just ahead or just behind us again. In the end, everything must have evened out and we arrived at the bottom of the canyon and the edge of Lake Mackintosh together. Just two minutes later, fellow South African Team Merrell arrived as well. They had had a strong start, racing in the Top 5 for most of the first day, but had somewhere fallen behind us on or after the mountains.

On the Mountain Lakes...

We set out onto Lake Mackintosh with less than two hours of daylight left. The first 12km section was completed with all four of us in a single inflatable raft. This was obviously quite uncomfortable and resulted in us getting quite cold by the time we reached a shoreline transition at dusk. Merrell and Quechua, both faster paddling teams, were still here and we quickly joined them beside the warm fire before swapping into 2 red plastic boats and heading back out onto the lake for a further 20km of paddling with an additional 2km portage.

The first section on Lake Mackintosh was stunning. The wind had died for the first time in the race, perfect timing to avoid an otherwise nasty headwind. With the moonlight and scattered clouds hanging over the mountains surrounding the long, elongated lake, we had an eerie two hours until we got to the take-out. At the start of the portage, we were quickly passed by Swedish Team AXA, who had had the foresight (and excess baggage allowance) to bring along a kayak trolley. They did struggle to load two kayaks onto it, but were still significantly faster than us on the road over the saddle of the mountains and down to Lake Rosebery on the other side. Here we re-caught Merrell for a moment before pushing off into the lake. However, the last section went poorly for me as tiredness set in and we had to slow down whilst I worked out direction on the lake. It was with great relief that we reached transition in the lakeside town of Tullah, where we got 2 hours of sleep before setting off, the first sleep of the race.

Jungles are just so much more fun with a bike...

Our two hours of sleep was perfectly timed so that we left transition on our bikes at first light. As a result, we had a good average speed for this section, being both refreshed and having the advantage of full day light.

The 105km route took us through a variety of forested landscapes. It started off with a steep and slippery climb up a single track under the forest canopy. At the top we had our one major mechanical of the race – a puncture. Nathan managed to get a spare tube in place before we got too cold in a light drizzle that was falling on the mountain top. The single track continued on the other side, where we almost missed a turnoff to start the trail. The majority of it was decidedly unrideable however, with big erosion ruts running down the centre. A few kilometers of this and it was over and we were entering the town of Rosebery. At this stage, it was 9am on a Friday morning, so perfect timing for a café stop where we quickly bought some pies and fruit juice, our first hot food in over 2 days. After that the route climbed once again to an abandoned mining town where we picked up a disused and ancient railway line. We were passed by Aussie team CBD at this point, only for us to see them again a few kilometers later returning in the reverse direction as they went back to punch the CP they had cycled passed at the abandoned town.

This section of the route was a real highlight, as we followed the gently sloped cuttings left by the railway along steep wooded mountain slopes. The result was some highly enjoyable and technical riding, including a long sweeping downhill

section of about 10 km. Even the highlight had a highlight however, as we had to cross the Montezuma Falls suspension bridge at one point, a hiking trail bridge that replaced a long lost railway bridge.

Next followed a flatter, more open section, where we picked up another old railway line (the historic Emu Bay Railway) that led us into the town of Zeehan. We thought that this would be a faster section, but that notion was disproved quite early as we started hitting densely overgrown sections of the route, with lots of prickly gorse bush and deep mud holes in our way. In Zeehan we took another opportunity to get more fresh food into our bodies as we stopped at another café, leaving town just as Team CBD arrived.

The final section from the town of Zeehan to the town of Strahan (the southern most point of the race course and the mid-way transition) went by much faster as we hopped onto the main west coast tar road, only taking one detour towards the end to find a CP in some sand-dune covered forest. Our route choice was poor here, as we found ourselves carrying bikes over sandy ground and tree-fall whilst Team CBD bypassed us on a more rideable route. We had one final CP in Strahan itself, before arriving at Midway for our compulsory 6-hour stop. We'd covered the 105km ride in around 9 hours, arriving mid-afternoon in 12th place. After scrubbing down our bikes (environmental regulations) and packing them away again, we were presented with a cooked Tazzie breakfast (with a lot of much needed fatty foods) and then got about 4 hours of sleep. Coasteering and Fynbos...

We left Strahan at 9pm on the third day of racing, exactly 60 hours into the race. We knew the time would be misleading, as the three longest legs of the race now lay ahead of us, all following in consecutive order. We started by trekking the 4km from Strahan to the west coast, passing an American team on the side of the track, one of their number having a bit of problems with gypso guts. Less than 15 minutes later, Nathan was having the same problem as we started walking north up the beach. We started plugging Nathan with electrolyte replacement and any other medication that we had, but it would be a few hours still before he started feeling good again. This was a common thread amongst all the top team, with on average, one person per team suffering some stomach trouble within 30 minutes of leaving mid-camp. Hmmm.

The team managed a very fast walking speed going north, with the flat beach and low tide giving us a superb hard surface to cover lots of ground every hour. We could see the lights of two teams in the long kilometers of darkness ahead of us, presumably Merrell and CBD. We were quite pleased to cover this ground in the dark, as the monotony of the landscape in daylight hours could have become a bit much. However, we also didn't get a glimpse of it in the dark and had to wait for the photos to see what we missed.

About 12km along we got to the Henty Dunes, the most technical navigation section of the entire race. We had two CPs to punch just inland of the coast, made all the more difficult in the darkness. We managed to nail them spot on, sneaking into the first as various other teams scoured the nearby area, their headlamps doing huge sweeps of the sand and dune vegetation a few ridges away (comparing notes afterwards, this was Teams AXA and CBD). We got to the CP just as Quechua approached from the other side and a joint effort a short while later saw us locate the 2nd CP without too much time loss. From here it was back to the beach and the first river crossing.

At 2am, the river was icy cold. As soon as we got to the water's edge, we did the standard trick and stripped to down to nothing, keeping our clothes dry for the 40m swim across a lagoon. Quechua were more hesitant and we put in a small gap on them that we slowly extended.

The second and final river crossing was a much easier affair. We only got wet to our hips when crossing at the river mouth, so we didn't slow down much at all. On the other side, we knew we had to trek 1km upriver, but the bush looked impenetrable. The next hour was spent trying various alternatives up and down the coast with no further luck. In the end we returned to our original starting point where Quechua were still warming themselves up on a fire next to a fisherman's camp after swimming the river. We decided it was just time to plough on through the riverside jungle and quickly found that it wasn't as bad as we first thought. An hour wasted.

We left Quechua behind at the fire. They looked to be in very poor condition and we never saw them again, finding out later that they pulled out of the race shortly thereafter. We found the CP further upriver and then started a mountainous section of the course, slightly inland from the sea. Getting out of the first gorge away from the river on a slippery foot track was the toughest part. We soon broke out of the forest and started traversing mountainous terrain with scrub bush that was almost identical to the fynbos back home in the Cape region. For John and Bubbles, it must almost have felt like being back home on the Garden Route, with dense temperate jungle similar to that near Knysna sitting at the bottom of fynbos-covered mountains such as the Outeniquas.

There were quite a few significant climbs, the first up to Cumberland Hill, where we had a CP in an ancient mine quarry near the summit. We had a big surprise here when we saw the top Aussie team, Blackheart, just 15 minutes ahead. This perked the team up, as we realized that we had a good night, with Blackheart leaving the previous transition many hours ahead of us. We kept them in sight over the next few hours as we climbed more mountains, but never managed to catch them. At another CP at Gap Peak, we saw Blackheart catch another team in the distance, which later proved to be fellow

South African's Merrell.

It was mid-afternoon at this stage and for the first time in the race, the weather had gotten uncomfortably warm. At the same time, following ridgelines had meant we had been away from fresh running water for a while and the combined effect took its toll on the team. After a further CP, we crossed a forested ravine where I saw my first tiger snake of the race, sunning itself nicely on a sunny patch on the track. These are supposed to be the most dangerous of Tasmania's plethora of dangerous snakes. It moved off quickly and I didn't mention it to the team. Only when comparing notes after the race, did we find out that we'd seen about 6 of these tiger snakes between us out on the course.

The final section of the trek was a long downhill on a dirt road into Granville Harbour. We passed Blackheart on the way in, who were spending about an hour sleeping in the shade of a large bush. Merrell were still in transition as we arrived. This section of the course proved to be the worst for me. I had come down with a throat infection just 24 hours before the race, and although I almost managed to contain it, the cold sea-paddle and the subsequent conditions saw it get into my lungs, leaving me coughing my way through the intermediate 4 days. I was now running a good fever as well and spent well over an hour trying to assemble my bike and get down enough food and water before the next 150km bike leg. At the same time, we were losing valuable daylight hours, as the first section of the bike leg would be a technically and navigationally challenging coastal ride. I ended up taking some antibiotics and hoping I could contain it until the subsequent leg, where a river paddle and compulsory dark zone section would give my body the break it needed. Heading inland, and a nice café stop...

The first section saw us pushing their bikes frequently as we constantly bogged down in the soft sand of various vehicle tracks. There were a lot of locals about near Granville, enjoying a nice Saturday evening on the beach with their scrambler bikes and fishing rods. Needless to say, we got more than a few comic jests thrown our way. We were soon passed by a much refreshed Team Blackheart, who took an alternative route from us just as the race course was about to leave the coast and head inland. We had a choice of following a track that was marked 'Track Navigable, but Not Rideable', or heading further up on a flat beach and darting inland to pick up another track on the map behind some sand dunes. We chose the latter.

We had a stunning 4km ride along the shore line on flat, hard sand before turning inland. John had taken over the navigation until I recovered and he hit the turnoff spot on. We then pushed our bikes for about 1 km, into the dunes, but it wasn't as bad as expected. We came very close to hitting the intended track at the edge of the forest, but we stopped just one dune short, then spent the next 30 minutes searching elsewhere before returning to our original point and finding the track on the other side. Annoying, but it could have been worse, with some teams spending 2 or 3 hours trying to get through to the CP on the alternative route choice. On the other side we started heading up the track for the CP, bumping into Team Merrell who had spent even longer trying to get there. After a bit of climbing, we got to it in an open meadow and then started following a series of larger forest roads that took us further inland into a famous section of natural forest called the Tarkine. After not sleeping the previous night (we'd slept in mid-camp the afternoon before), we decided to sleep early. We pitched our compulsory tent for the first time and got a great 2 hours worth of sleep before continuing. We crossed a large river at a small hamlet called Corinna. There was no bridge, but the organizers had been kind enough to provide us with a makeshift ferry, four inflatable boats strapped together that got the whole team, the ferryman and our bikes across in one go. From there we started a never-ending climb. We slept once more for another hour on the side of the road (no tent this time). A few teams passed us, but with various teams sleeping all over the place during the course of the night, it was impossible to tell what position was which.

Sunrise brought the joy of a tar road as we passed the Savage River Mine, adding some speed to an otherwise extremely slow leg. We passed Team Buff, the reigning world champions, who were having mechanical problems with a bike. They also pulled out of the race at the next CP, when one of the team got too ill to continue. The 30km section on tar until we hit the town of Waratah was the quietest tar road we've ever ridden on, with only 1 car passing us.

In Waratah we punched the CP and immediately headed to the nearest café, which was thankfully open at 9am on a Sunday morning. Leaving town we met up with Merrell again, who had been in a second café, riding with them for a few kilometers before entering the forests again and starting the final part of the leg. Apart from the standard fair of steep ups and down, the final few kilometers were dominated by an ugly 7 km long stretch of boggy forest track, where pushing, pulling and carrying our bikes through it took 2.5 hours. We suffered more than the other teams, losing contact with Merrell and being passed by the two Australian teams, Blackheart and CBD. Exiting the muddy track, we crossed the Arthur River, where Team AXA were busy putting their boats into the river in 4th place for the next 75 km paddling leg, then a short 4km uphill cycle into transition, passing the British team, Adidas Terrex on their way down to the river.

Paddling through the Tarkine ...

There were four teams in transition (Merrell, Blackheart, CBD and Cyanosis) at the same time. Added to this was the looming dark zone cut-off at 7.30pm, after which teams were not allowed to continue paddling until the dawn the following morning, and things were very busy. We were last onto the water, but CBD had to immediately return due to a puncture in their inflatable boat. We then paddled hard to get 6km down river in the remaining 45 minutes before the dark zone

started, so that we could get within walking distance of a CP in the surrounding hills which the rules allowed us to collect at night. We got to the most suitable spot with 7 minutes to spare, to find the boats of AXA and Merrell still there. Blackheart took their boats out just around the next corner and CBD joined us a few minutes later. With Team Adidas Terrex only 40 minutes further down river and a Columbian team, Vidaraid about 20 minutes behind, it meant that race positions 4th through to 10th would only be separated by an hour when racing resumed at 06.30 am, after 5 full days of racing.

After pulling out boats up out of the water, we quickly located the CP about 1 km up a small forest track. Team AXA was still in the area looking for it, having previously lost lots of time searching for it too high up river. We returned to our boats, pitched our tent and after a quick communal supper with Merrell around a camp fire, got some much needed rest. We were ready to go 1 minute before 6.30 the next morning. Since no-one had synchronized watches, all the teams started paddling downstream together, Merrell and AXA pulling ahead as expected and us settling down between Blackheart and CBD. The region was pristine wilderness, with thick forest coming down the sides of the gorge on both the left and right. From the put-in till the take-out 75 km later, we floated through the heart of the Tarkine, only seeing one man-made feature, a pipeline bridge. Through this whole distance, the river was a regular series of easy to moderate rapids, with no major dangers of tree blocks, strainers or siphons. About mid-morning, we were given a chance to stretch our legs to get a CP on a small hilltop to the left of the gorge, which gave us good time checks on all the positions from 4th through to 9th. Round about midday, Nathan and I took our first swim in a rapid. The red plastic boats had a tendency to allow water over the shallow back deck (especially when coming to an abrupt standstill on a rock in a rapid), which quickly flipped the boat. Shortly after our swim, one of the Blackheart boats did the same, resulting in a map loss for the team. Rob, their navigator, quickly checked our maps to try and memorize the river ahead and the final CP up a side river before the team pulled away from us again.

Nathan and I took a second swim a few kilometers later, which allowed CBD to catch and pass us. They were pushing the pace to stay in contact with their fellow Australians, Blackheart. Meanwhile, I got a bit confused with the navigation for a while, as the dense forest didn't leave too many distinguishing features whilst paddling down the river. Keeping tabs of the map for a few major river bends helped and we soon started looking for the side river to our left, whilst Blackheart, then CBD paddled about 500m ahead of us.

We eventually found the side river and paddled up it for about 400m where we reached a rapid. Team Adidas Terrex passed us going the other way as they made their way back downriver after finding the CP. We left our boats lying at the first rapid next to AXA's and Merrell's, with us wondering where Blackheart and CBD were. The bush on the side of the river was unusually passable and we made good progress for the remaining 700m upstream, hearing, but not seeing Merrell and AXA as they returned to their boats. We found the CP and retreated as quickly, getting back to our boats with no sign of the two Aussie teams. From there, it was a final 15km stretch down to the end of the paddle, with us pushing the pace to avoid spending a second night on the river. We got to the take out at about 5.30pm, finding that Blackheart and CBD had both missed the turnoff up the side river and were now preparing to trek back overland through the night to get to the CP.

To the Coast...

Our bodies had had a good rest in the last 24 hours on the river and with the dark-zone, so we had a quick transition and set out on a 70 km mountain bike leg that we expected would go pretty quickly. We were now firmly in 7th place, but there was a danger that a few teams could complete the entire paddle within one day, getting off the water before the 7.30 pm dark-zone and challenging us for this position. The first part of this cycle did go fast, as we averaged about 25km/hr along flat tar roads which gradually took us north and east towards Tasmania's north coast. There were a few route choices where we stuck to the flatter sections as long as possible, before entering a final hilly section with some more forest. With darkness now hanging over us again, we struggled to find the correct trail shortly after crossing the Black River, and in the end decided to reverse and take a longer detour around this complex section. We must have come extremely close to getting out, but the map just didn't make sense at the time. A final downhill took us to the coast near Rocky Cape, where we reached transition, about an hour adrift of Team Merrell. Just two short sections left!

The standard sting in the tail...

Needless to say that it wasn't simple or short (time-wise), and that we spent a lot longer than planned on the next 25km coastering leg. We left transition at midnight, but immediately found ourselves struggling with sleep deprivation. We found the first CP fairly easily, and then set off down the beach before hitting the first pieces of rocky shoreline. Our pace was achingly slow, although we did get an adrenaline shot when we saw the light of a team coming down behind us. We never found out who it was, as we spent the next hour searching various dead-end trails before finally finding one that took us across the Rocky Cape peninsula to the next CP at a jetty.

At 3am in the morning, we decided to give in to sleep deprivation and seek shelter in a parking lot's toilet facilities for a short sleep. Sleeping on the cold concrete floor of toilets has become a common theme in all of the teams expedition races over the last four years. Whilst sleeping, the weather finally decided to take a turn for the worse and the roof was soon being pelted by a good storm. At the time, we felt lucky to have found this shelter to sit the storm out, but at the same

time, a 1 hour sleep turned into 2.5 hours, much more than we needed in hindsight.

At dawn, and with an improvement in the weather, we headed out onto a hiking trail that went over the hills just back from the shoreline, allowing us to avoid a particularly nasty section of the coast with cliffs and lots of rocks. Returning to the coast, we had our biggest surprise in a while when we saw Team Merrell just 15 minutes ahead of us, having spent the previous night negotiating the coastline right at sea level. We pushed hard to close the gap, having a brief chat to them as our paths crossed going to a CP on a rocky peninsula jutting out into the sea. With the race on for 6th / 7th or 8th (we didn't know our standing), we kept the pace high, jogging the coastal trail as it weaved around headlands and through small seaside towns.

We finally caught them searching for the final CP of the leg, which was positioned slightly dubiously. The control description indicated it was 20m upsteam of where a creek crossed the trail. There was no specific stream or hollow here, rather just a medium sized valley between two hills. After about 5 minutes of searching, we eventually found it only about 20m to the side of the lowest part of the valley. Unfortunately, 20m in this bush made it fairly invisible, with many teams struggling to find it, particularly at night. We attempted to sneak out of there before Merrell saw the CP, but were unsuccessful, leading to a head-to-head race along the coastal trail to the final transition in the village of Boat Harbour. About 1km away, Merrell took an opportunity to get away from us and ramped up the speed, in the end opening 4 minutes on the final rocky section. We were disappointed, but not surprised to see that another team had passed us in the night, Team FJS from Sweden, who had done a sterling job to finish the river paddle within 1 day and avoid the darkzone.

The sprint for home...

We had our quickest transition of the race, less than five minutes, before starting the final leg, a 35km cycle to the finish in Burnie. We pushed hard, but never got in sight of Merrell, who were undoubtedly also going flat out. The terrain was hilly and the roads wove us past Table Cape, taking us east into a headwind that had been our standard fair for all of the bike legs. With team work, we managed to keep the speed high however and covered the distance in just less than 2 hours.

We entered the velodrome at Burnie's main stadium for 1 and a ½ laps of the track, taking the South African flag for the final lap. After 6 days, 2 hours and some minutes, we finally crossed the finish line to take 8th place. This race will be noted for its close finishes up and down the field, with less than 2 hours separating winners Team Thule from 3rd place, and a track sprint between Adidas Terrex and AXA separating them into 4th and 5th position by 1 second. We were 15 minutes behind Merrell in 7th and a further 8 minutes behind FJS in 6th, but the disappointment on loosing out on a close race paled into insignificance compared to the joy and relief of having finished this 733km expedition.

Overall it was a great result for the team, achieving our goal of a Top 10 finish and once again improving on our World Champs final position. The team worked very well together, despite having been put together quite late in the day, and have taken a horde of valuable experiences away with us. Cyanosis couldn't have asked for much more, with our race strategy paying off and with navigation mistakes kept to only a few hours. We thoroughly enjoyed the race and the Tasmanian wilderness; it was definitely a World Champs that was not to be missed!

Team Cyanosis

[www.teamcyanosis.com](http://www.teamcyanosis.com)

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