



RACE REPORT: Adventure Racing World Championships 2011 [part 1 of x]

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Author: Liza Pye

[PART ONE OF X]

Earlier this fall, Tecnu Extreme/Kailash adventure racing team set off on an epic adventure down under for the 2011 Adventure Racing World Championships. Our team captain, Kyle Peter, threw together a team that would be able to conquer the Tasmanian wilderness in style; Tecnu veteran Marco Rossini Amselem, seasoned adventure racer Ryan VanGorder of DART–nuun fame, and this Canadian girl Liza Pye. Although we'd never raced together as a whole team, we knew that our combined race experiences would be a huge asset in our goal of making a name for ourselves on the international racing circuit.



As the wheels hit the tarmac in Launceston we were all filled with the excited anticipation of what was facing us in the upcoming week. The next few days were busy with last minute race food purchases, logistical meetings, pre–race skills testing, and finally, the opportunity to study the race maps. Like opening a present on Christmas morning, our eyes gaped and hearts fluttered as the racecourse was unveiled to us. We were about to embark on a week–long adventure that would see us travel 733km through northwestern Tasmania on foot, by bike, and by kayak. It was going to be larger–than–life! We excitedly packed food and gear in our race bins – the stuff that would be our lifeline in the upcoming days – and settled in for our last night in a warm cozy bed until we crossed the finish line and unknown number of days later.

Morning came and we changed into our paddling gear for our first leg of the race. Waddling down to the beach with foggy sleep still occupying my brain, I was filled with the nervous anticipation of race morning. For me, the start line is a fine balance of exhilaration and terror. Adventure racing is never straightforward; we will face situations where we'll be challenged physically, mentally, and emotionally; we will both hit rock bottom and feel like we are soaring above the clouds; we will laugh and we will cry. We will suffer; and at the end of the day, every single step of these 733kms will teach us more about who we are and what we're made of. This is why we do this.

We took off from the Burnie shoreline with 79 other teams in a frenzy of paddles and boats. Our strategy off the bat was to have the two stronger paddlers, Ryan and Kyle up front in the plastic sit–on–top boat towing Marco and I in the finicky inflatable. This way, the inflatable could be better kept under control in the side wind that was blowing on shore that day and we could really harness the power of the rigid, streamline, sit–on–top. We made good time with this setup and we quickly made it to the front of the paddling pack. It was amazing to look over and see the likes of Buff, Thule, and Silva either paddling alongside, or behind us.

At CP1, Kyle hopped out onto the beach for a mad dash to the very first control of the race. Each control at ARWC had a unique punch that you had to stamp into the designated square on your team's control card. To ensure that all 4 team members did indeed hike into the

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more remote checkpoint together (as opposed to letting a tired team member rest at the beginning of an out-and-back) the race organizers also adorned wrists with paper bracelets, which were to be punched at designated CPs.

Back in the boats for the final stretch to our first transition area (TA), we cruised past waves crashing in on rocks and exposed kelp beds and crustacean sea life clinging to rock walls in the mid-tide. We were truly on the big seas!

TA1 was fast and furious; I quickly released the pressure that had been building in my bladder and the boys threw our pfd's, throw bags, and kayak paddles into our team paddle bag. We were out of there in a blink of an eye and set a mean pace on foot out of the TA and toward the shooting range where our next challenge awaited us: hitting 1 of 5 clay pigeon shots! Ryan assured us that with his college course in shooting he was a clear shoe-in to be elected the shooter for our team, however; it's not clear whether he was just out of practice, or if the shooting skills were lost in the smoky haze of college days because the 5 shots alluded him and we were forced to stop for a 10min penalty to catch our breath.

From the firing range we ran our way through our first taste of Australian single track. We were overcome by the fragrant smells of the forests as the slick mud trail network led us through some challenging navigation to the rest of the trekking CPs. We were setting pace with teams Adidas Terrex and Wilderness Traverse at this point, and through some good navigation by Kyle we even caught the tail ends of team Seagate in our sights for the first, and last time, of the entire race. It was in the humid undergrowth during a thick bushwhack that I suddenly felt a bit lightheaded and my body seemed to drop a few gears. I admitted to Ryan that I wasn't feeling great and as we neared TA2 where we'd meet our bike boxes I deteriorated to the point that Kyle had me on the towline even on the downhill. Dizzy and lightheaded, I stumbled past the TA volunteers and beelined it for the sanctuary of our bike boxes and gear bin. I concentrated here on staying focused, breathing deep, and getting my bike built but my tummy soon got the better of me, and I found myself involuntarily on all fours, grass gripped hard between my sweaty fingers, and my stomach lurching as I emptied my guts of the morning's food.

A feeling of complete helplessness nearly overcame me as my paralyzed body tried to play boss over my mind. I pushed images of a wounded and straggling Team Tecnu out of my imagination and as soon as I was released from the clutches of physical sickness I knew the only remedy was to get on my bike and not even consider the option of taking a rest. The boys rallied (I'm not quite sure what they were thinking of me at that time - had their teammate been overtaken by some sore of hard-driven devil?), and we were soon off on our bikes. Needless to say, my energy came in fits and starts as I sipped at my diluted nuun electrolyte drink and attempted to stomach some easy foods. Ryan towed me most of the way through the paved roads that led us to a series of caves at Gunns Plains where we had to find a series of checkpoints underground. The constant drone and repetition of turning the pedals over and over lulled my body and mind and I began to feel somewhat recovered, but as soon as we pulled in to the caving area and dismounted our bikes I was once again hit by the nausea-monster. I tried to act as casually as I could (don't want the competition to know that we're weak!) as I took the direct route toward a stand of exotic-looking Tassie ferns and proceeded to douse the poor plants with the contents of my watery stomach. I did not go without notice, however; as the TA volunteer took this as an opportunity to point out that although we seemed to be sorting ourselves out already, the toilets, should we need them, were located down by the cave entrance.

At this point I have to admit that I began to worry; how could I contribute to a team if I couldn't even keep any water down? How was I supposed to get through 6, 7, or possibly even 8 more days of racing with a start like this? Was it smart to keep moving, or should we stop and wait this thing out? A sick and foggy mind is no competition for the clarity of my teammate's will, and I soon found myself packaged up inside my warm clothes and hiking down toward the cave entrance, weakly clutching onto my water bottle for dear life. The memory of the cave is hazy for me, but I do remember map confusion, staircases and ladders leading us up and down through cool dark passages, and teams separated but squished amongst each other as we crawled on all fours over sharp rocks through the claustrophobic spaces and the cold dark abiotic waters of the cave. All checkpoints cleared, we finally emerged into the welcome embrace of the warm sun and I felt my spirits lift. We had a few minutes to spare here and I managed to scarf down a fruit cup that I spied in the side of Marco's backpack. It was the first time I'd craved any sort of nourishment in hours and I hungrily slurped the sweet syrup down without sparing a single drop.

Evening came and my teammates continued to push and pull me southward on my mountain bike, until, at some point, we traded in our wheels for running shoes and set out on the first major trek of the race; a 60km (23-hour) epic that would take us up and over high country ridges and back down into a river-valley bottom. At this point we were rolling in and around 9th place and were psyched that the momentum was continuing to flow despite my illness earlier that day. In the transition area beside the likes of Swedish team AXA Sports Club, and Canadian Wilderness Traverse, we quickly inhaled some warm meals, stuffed a day's worth of race food into our packs, and set off on foot uphill in the darkness toward the Tiger Plains.

Normally I'm pretty good on my feet. Running is one of my strengths, and this is usually where my team doesn't have to worry too much about whether I'm keeping up or not. This night was different. The day's violent caloric expulsion and subsequent deficit had taken its toll and I was left completely flat. My legs felt as if they belonged to a rubber chicken that has spent the winter on the couch and my head was full of cotton. The back-end of the tow rope was soon attached to my waist belt and I found myself being tugged higher and higher up the increasingly windy mountain trail by Kyle's unwavering body. Finding the pace too slow, Ryan needed to run ahead in the cold darkness to stay awake and Marco brought up the rear while patiently offering me Brazilian novelty snacks to keep my energy up. My mind and body begged for sleep, however; I knew that Kyle's preference was to push through the first night, for his early race adrenalin rush would still be going strong and he feared being unable to really sleep should we stop. For the first time this race, the team wasn't operating as a single unit; we were beginning to become physically unglued from flow of determined strength we needed to perform well at a race like this. We needed to remedy the situation, and we needed to do it fast. The further we climbed up the mountain ridge the colder and windier it became and so if we wanted to sleep we'd have find a spot now. Much to my surprise, it didn't take much more than a quick suggestion from both Ryan and I and we were soon off the trail and into a clearing in the thick underbrush with bags being ripped open and sleeping supplies drawn out. Mandatory gear requirements ensured that we had a tent just big enough for the 4 of us, two small sleeping bags to share, one trusty Adventure Medical Kits Escape bivy each, and one sleeping pad to shield us from the cold ground.

The decision to take some voluntary sleep during an adventure race is not always an easy one. Past experience tells us seasoned adventure racers that taking the time to sleep usually pays off in the end, but that doesn't seem to ever make the decision to close our eyes and lay completely stationary on the side of the trail any easier. Luckily for us, the decision did pay off. When we awoke from our 3hr nap I felt about as good as someone could who'd already been adventure racing for 20+ hours, the nausea was gone and I was ready to rock. Also, we later learned that by sleeping away some of the darkest hours of the night and getting some mental rest before tackling the challenging navigation and damp cold winds of Tiger Plains, we managed to avoid making a major navigational error that caught a lot of the teams off guard. We were back on track!

As the race wore on, the hours quickly faded into days and our pace continued to remain steady. We suffered through cold water canyon swims, seemingly infinite bushwhacks through the thick Tasmanian bush, and saved some good time on the lake paddling section into Tullah with our energy-saving portage wheels.

From Tullah, our plans to shortcut part of our upcoming 105km ride were thwarted by some seriously impenetrable Tasmanian bush. Unfortunately, when turning back on our route choice we ran into the Swedish team FJS, thereby facilitating their decision to not to waste their energy on the uphill bushwhacky shortcut and instead follow behind us up the switchbacks and onto some technical single-track. I was happy to see that we were able to outbike FJS through the tricky terrain. Our momentum carried us up and over the technical trails faster than the Swedes and before long we were out of their sights. A handful of CPs, one beautiful crossing of the bridge over Montezuma falls, and some blissfully fast single track and we were soon rolling on tarmac close to the western Tasmanian seaport town of Strahn and mandatory 6-hour stop at Mid-Camp. One tricky CP we had to snag before we could settle in for our much-anticipated break brought us off the tarmac and into a network of logging roads.

Sometimes during a long expedition AR we can go hours or days without seeing another team and we have to actually remind ourselves that we are indeed in a race - that we need to keep pushing. Amongst the logging roads above Strahn we came face-to-face with the reality of the competition when we noticed that two strong teams were right on our tails; the Spanish team Columbia, and Australians Mountain Designs. We had some difficult route choices amongst the twists and turns of the logging roads and we tried our best to sneak out of their sights and let the adrenalin of the chase drive our pedals harder so they wouldn't see us bagging the elusive CP. A quick dash back out to the rolling asphalt and we were soon in Strahn - surrounded by "civilization" and, once in Mid-Camp, more teams than we'd seen in one place since the race had started some 60+ hours before. The four of us were very thankful for the hot meal and clean dry tent provided here by the race organizers and the much-needed opportunity to catch our breaths and reorganize our energy before heading out on what was to be some of the most epic and beautiful terrain we'd encountered yet.

[TO BE CONTINUED. STAY TUNED!]

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Thomasine Merrick Peter Amazing! I will stayed tuned!

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Mary Pye Fun to read...good job Lizie! Can't wait for the next installment. Maybe the Tecnu Moms (and other relatives) should write a race report too. LOL!

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Thomasine Merrick Peter No! Let's wait for the book!

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Marco Rossini Menichelli Amselem Very nice Liza, you rock girl!!!

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Anthony Gordon One of the greatest race reports in history ... need more like this ... way to go [Liza Pye](#)

November 25, 2011 at 6:14am · [Like](#) · [↻](#) 1

