

2011 ADVENTURE RACING WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS: TASMANIA.

Written by **Bob Miller**

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2011 Adventure Racing World Championships

Tasmania, Australia

5 to 10 Day Expedition Race

730km Total Distance

Race Report by Bob Miller of Team WildernessTraverse.com

Team-mates: Jack Van Dorp (Canada), Sarah Fairmaid (New Zealand), Gordon Blythen (New Zealand)

Pre Race (Burnie, Tasmania)

Travel to Tasmania was smooth except Jack was missing a bag of gear (lost by the airline). At least we were not flying over the next few days, as our airline (Qantas) grounded their fleet in a labour dispute - apparently a team missed the entire race because of this. Pre-race was hectic with last-minute food shopping and Jack replacing over \$1000 in equipment. Our hotel was decent, but the wireless internet was sporadic at best, causing concern about whether we'll be able to view google-earth before the race. This had become a critical step in our pre-race route plotting as the aerial imagery can offer clues to un-mapped roads and ideal route choices.

Registration and pre-race formalities were smooth giving solace that the event directors had their shit together! We received the maps and the course looked good: remote with short and fast stages early on, followed by epic long stages in the later half.

At 10:00pm Jack's missing bag shows up unexpectedly at our hotel? Too bad we've handed over our 5 gear bins, 4 bike boxes and 1 kayak bag to the organizers 5 hours ago, and won't have access to them again until we're at TA's on the course. Our hotel's internet ends up being unavailable while we're preparing the maps, bummer! At least we'll get a good night's sleep.

Day One (0 – 24hrs): ocean kayak 17k, trek 20k, bike 20k, caving 1k, bike 50k, trek 30k
 Total distance traveled on Day 1: 138k

9:00am and the race is on! We get away from shore reasonably well (among the 80 other teams and 160 kayaks....chaos!). We have one inflatable and one hard-shell kayak. Jack and I are in the hard shell, which starts diving into waves and swamping causing us to worry there may be a leak. We call over Gordie and Sarah to help us switch spots (me to the front) as Jack is heavier by 20lbs. This helps and the boat stops diving as much and we start passing teams. One hour and 8k later we're at the first CP in 2nd place, nice! Impressively, Team Seagate has already opened a 5



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minute lead on the field. The first TA is chaos, we exit in 3rd losing a spot to Team AXA. The race is young and you can feel the pent-up energy being unleashed. Clay pigeon shooting????? Gordie blows a few to pieces, okay, that was kinda cool. Onto the first trek with some easy orienteering (mostly trails), but I manage to make some silly errors. A few minutes at each of the first two CP's and a foolish parallel feature error on the next costs us half an hour. I tell myself to stay decisive and ignore the teams around me. The time loss isn't a big deal in the grand scheme of the race, but it's not great for my confidence, which is so critical.

Into the second TA in roughly 10th place and we're off at a solid pace on bikes. Gordie and Jack take turns leading into a nasty headwind as I'm holding-on at the back, not feeling much power...."come on thighs! start producing!" Next up is a fun little cave. Too bad I need to do some navigation inside and am not able to take-in the scenery. The cave sure looked cool in the pictures after the race though.

Back onto the bikes and again we're riding smooth. We get passed by Team Buff (although they appear to be blowing up one team member who's lagging behind) and also Team AXA. There was a critical turn on this leg we luckily spot down an old, overgrown road. Had it not been signed, I would have ridden past for sure...."stay focused on the maps!" I'm constantly reminding myself through the entire race. Into the next TA and it's still tight at the front, we've gained some spots and were within 30 minutes of most of the front-runners.

Off into the night on foot we ascend to a broad ridge and the highest elevation this course we'll traverse. The wind is howling, there's intermittent rain and sleet and we're off-trail across scrubby grass-land. We hit the next CP (a road and creek junction) after following a general bearing for roughly 4km. I'm surprised and feeling a bit lucky that we found it within 300m of where we intersect the road. At day-break we're joined by Team Buff again and we trek together off and on for the next couple hours. We hit a paved road and they start off at a steady jog, we try to keep pace, but something is bothering Jack, so we ease a bit.

Day Two (24 – 48hrs): 30k trek, 32k lake kayak, bike 30k
Total distance traveled on Day 2: 92k

We have maybe 14k left on this trek, but find ourselves on a greasy over-grown trail heading down to a waterfall rappel. Jack's pace has slowed considerably, especially going downhill. He's beginning to feel a stabbing pain on the side of his knee. Luckily Sarah is a physiotherapist with extensive knowledge of endurance sport injuries and quickly diagnoses it as resulting from a tight IT Band. Unluckily, there's not much she can do to alleviate the pain, and Jack begins a steady regimen of anti-inflammatories and pain-killers.

At the next CP on top of the rappel we're informed we're in 7th place! This is a surprise given our slowed pace. We're also informed the rappel is cancelled due to high water levels and an inability to rig a safe descent. We head into the canyon on a side trail to face the toughest stretch of trekking in the race. Dense bush, cold swims, slippery rocks and river crossings make for a slow 6km. We hit the TA to paddling with Teams Quecha and Cyanosis, and AXA not far behind.

It's close to night-fall and we begin this paddle with 4 people in a 2-man inflatable (the only option for getting us out of this remote area). 10 minutes into the paddle and our kayak is full of water and appears to be taking on more???? We pull over, dump it out, look for leaks (can't find any) and shove off again. 10 minutes later, same thing. We quickly discuss our options and come to the conclusion it's a faulty boat so we return to the TA looking for another (and hopefully a time credit?). We set off again in a new boat, and of course it starts to do the same thing, shit! The boats weren't meant for that much weight and there's a flap on the back directing water into the kayak. We just wasted an hour.....the team is silent. Stay positive and keep looking forward. We paddle well and by the end of the leg catch back up to Quecha, Cyanosis and AXA. It's now close to midnight and we (especially me) start falling asleep uncontrollably. Not a great situation with some tricky night-time navigation on these lakes.

Jack keeps me focused as best he can, but I find it incredibly hard to concentrate, I continuously lose focus and begin yammering-on about some unrelated topic, "f**k, stay awake and stay on the map!" I keep telling myself. Into the TA, we opt for a 1 hour nap. I'm not certain it's the best decision, given the nature of this course: There's a mandatory 6-hour break after the next mountain bike leg, followed later by a dark-zone enforced, whitewater paddling leg where it's expected every team will spend 11 hours camped for the night. I'm not a huge fan of these course attributes, since they effectively take the sleep strategy out of the race, as most teams will race (without sleep) to the mandatory stop, then do the same before and after the whitewater leg. At least that's what I figured we'd be doing until we found ourselves snoozing away earlier than expected? Feeling energized we headed off at 5am into a light misty rain. In the first few hours we find ourselves riding with Quecha and Cyanosis again....maybe they slept too?

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Day 2: Trotting to the waterfall rappel. Photo: Vandorpracing.com



Day 2: Treacherous descent below the falls. Would have been next to impossible in the dark. Photo: Vandorpracing.com

Day Three (Hours 48 – 72): 65k bike, 6-hour mandatory break, 15k trek
Total distance traveled on Day 3: 80k

The morning of Day 3 and we're biking some fantastic trail. An old rail bed leads past Montezuma Falls (Tasmania's highest?), and the flowing, fast descent thereafter is another course highlight. We're again riding well and Jack's knee doesn't seem to be a problem. Only 12k from the TA and I manage to lose touch with the map while trying to locate a CP in logging area. Again, I let myself get influenced by an outside factor, this time some spectators I expected had directions to the CP, and shortly after some foot-prints hike-a-biking up a hill I thought we should descend (we turned back when we should have continued - the CP was less than 800m away!). We drop an hour fussing about before I get it sorted again.

Into mid-camp (the site of the 6-hour mandatory break), we're in 10th place. The race seems to have fractured with 3 teams (Seagate, Silva and Thule) in a front pack, followed by about 10 more teams spread out over roughly 5 hours, then a larger gap back the next group of teams. The mandatory break doesn't go well for our team. Both Sarah and Jack are having trouble digesting food, with it re-appearing shortly after consumption out one end, or the other. Upon leaving mid-camp Sarah's still fighting stomach issues and can't keep anything inside for digestion. She hasn't been able to process food for at least 8 hours. Our pace is slow, so we make the decision to start her on antibiotics and stop for another 2-hour sleep to see if she can come right.

It's around 1am when we start moving again. At least we're on a flat beach, which allows Jack to hold an okay pace with his bum knee, but we're still unable to run. We hit a sand-dune section, requiring navigation by aerial photo to some intricate CP's. I thoroughly f**k it up and we wander around the dunes, causing Jack immense pain (any type of uneven terrain is not good at this point) until day-break (5:30am) before I'm able to re-locate us with the help of a mapped picnic area. We'd entered the dunes too early, got pulled further south (when we should have gone north) by foot-prints and searched fruitlessly on parallel features. At this point, on the morning of Day 4, our team almost pulls the plug. The surmounting adversities: Sarah's GI issues, Jack's knee and my navigation errors have us at an all time low. Jack considers walking out to a nearby road to drop-out of the race as his knee is causing excruciating pain. We talk it through and decide to continue, but with renewed goals. We'll stop racing and try to reach the finish line as a ranked team.



Day 3: Gordie waiting for me to sort out our route. The CP was only 800 metres away but we back-tracked and lost an hour. Photo: Vandorpracing.com

Day Four (Hours 72 – 96): coastal trek 50k
Total distance traveled on Day 4: 50k

We continue on this stunning coastal trek rather sheepishly trying to come to terms with the fact we won't achieve the goal of the top 5 finish we'd agreed was achievable before the race. While trekking Jack is constantly in pain, but it seems to ebb and flow, perhaps with the effectiveness of the medications, the incline of the slopes, or most likely, the mental toughness, or fatigue he's enduring at any given moment.

By 4pm we've covered 23k since 7:00am that morning, averaging 2.5kph. At this rate I figure we'll be on this trek well into the night as we still have 27k left. I'm feeling uneasy though, as there's a 5k, off-trail mountainous stretch coming up after another 7k of trail, and it will be decidedly harder to navigate in the dark. I break the news to the team and hope Jack can find the energy to dig even deeper and move a bit faster for the next few hours. He takes on the challenge and astonishingly eats up the 7k of trail in 1.5 hours, and we're a further 2k off-trail at CP 34 having caught up to Team FJS and the Czech Adidas Team.

It's now 7:30pm and getting dark fast, we have 3k to reach the last difficult off-trail CP before we can cruise (navigationally speaking) into the next TA. I find myself desperately wanting to run ahead and spot this tricky little (needle in a haystack) CP atop a small peak in a low-lying mountain range. Jack has again slowed, perhaps having given too much to reach the last CP.

Just as darkness falls I'm able to spot the peak, but finding the checkpoint loses significance as Jack has slowed to a pace where I'm wondering if a helicopter rescue may be necessary. Over the next 4 hours we're only able to cover 4k and decide it's time to lay down in the grass for some rest. Again I think our race is over, and we simply need to get Jack out of the hills and into the next TA. It's 1:00am and we don't bother setting alarms. By 5am we figure we should start moving again. It seems the rest has been good for Jack's knee and the pace has improved. By 8am we hit the TA and instead of dropping out we get to work building our bikes for the longest 150k mountain bike section of the race.



Day 4: Hiking the dunes. We made the tough decision to stop racing and focus only on reaching the finish line. Photo: Vandorpracing.com

Day Five (Hours 96 – 120): bike 150k
Total distance traveled on Day 5: 150k

On bikes again, and we're moving quite well. So long as there are no big hike-a-bike stretches, we should be okay. 10k out of the TA and the trail we're on, runs smack into a wall of sand, hmmm? At the exact moment Team Quecha comes hiking down the wall and proclaims they've been hiking around these dunes for over 19 hours and have no clue what the Race Director is trying to achieve with this leg. Yikes! They've decided to pull out of the race and are heading back to the last TA. Umm, okay, well, we haven't seen any other teams, so figure there must be a way through.

We ascend the dune and look around. Jack makes the call that the dune has most likely blown over the trail, which appears logical as we're able to note the location of some creeks on the map. We move forward with a plan to intersect a trail further up the dunes. After roughly 2k of hiking and bike-whacking we're on the edge of another dune that's petering out into the thick underbrush and I'm feeling very uneasy about our prospect of having to hike-a-bike through the bush a further 2k to a CP and more established roads.

The AR gods must've been shining on us – right when we enter the bush we're able to recognize a very overgrown trail and it follows the direction of the trail on our map. Although hiking, we find the CP and good roads shortly after, phew!

Back riding again, we're chewing up kilometers and moving well, hmmm should we start racing again? Then we come upon a café in the town of Corrina and opt for fresh pizza and wraps, decidedly un-race like.

Back riding we catch up to the Adidas Czech team in the Town of Waratah, but then spot another café, and let them go as we enjoy fried egg sandwiches and hot chocolate. Okay, back to riding, it's dark with a light drizzle, we catch back up to the Czech's and find ourselves only 11k from the next TA at 1:30am. Maybe we can get on the water at day-break for the next paddle? Nope, not this time. I make a half-hour navigation error missing a critical junction then we find the trail leading to the TA is an over-grown, mud-hole riddled mess! Shit, not good for any team, but especially not for Jack's knee. 2.5 hours later we've moved 3k, it's time for a break. We keep this one to an hour and get moving in the early morning light. By 8:00am we reach the TA having seen Team Technu Extreme hiking down to the put-in, and also come across our friends the Czech's still in the TA, alongside Team Mountain Designs. At this point we're holding on to 15th place.

Day Six (Hours 120 – 144): Kayak & trek: 29k
Total distance covered on Day 6: 29k

Jack was obviously in a world of hurt on this 6th morning of the race, but I think the day's of enduring pain, lack of nutrition, influx of medications, immense mental strain and fatigue had built to a point where his body simply needed to shut-down and rest. We reached the TA and tried to eat, but his body refused, resulting in some projectile vomit. To add insult to injury we had to walk 5k downhill to the kayak put-in, and of course going downhill hurts the most with his injury.

We started paddling at 1:15pm and by 7:30pm (the start of the dark-zone) had covered 20k down river, which included two 2k trekking excursions to CP's in the hills beside the river. At least now we'd be forced to stop for 11 hours in the dark-zone at a comfortable camp-site. By 9pm, after a decent feed, we were all out cold!

Day Seven (Hours 144 – 168): Kayak 65k, bike 70k, trek 25k, bike 35k
Total distance covered on Day 7: 195k

Paddling down the Arthur River was easily the highlight of the race for me. Consistent class I & II whitewater, eagles overhead, fish jumping and all through a steep walled rainforested environment. We also started moving well again and Jack bounced back after our big rest. By the end of the paddle we even saw both the Czech team and Mountain Designs on a short out and back trek. We followed that up with a steady bike ride, although we missed an un-mapped road that supposedly would have shaved 45 minutes off (google earth would have helped here) and we had a scare when Gordie snapped 2 spokes (luckily no more broke).

Our final hurdle was the 25k coastal trek, but all in all, it didn't seem that bad. Jack was moving okay. I think he found a place to store the pain, or figured a way to cope with the injury. It's too bad we hit this in the dark, since I'm sure it would have been beautiful coastline. We trudged into the final TA at daybreak, for the only time in the race feeling like

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