

Mountain Designs Adventure Racing Team

Thursday, 12 September 2013

Team Mountain Designs take out 7th Edition XPD - Flinders Ranges

Team Mountain Designs XPD Flinders Ranges -Race Report

The preparation begins.....

Well looking back it is hard to know where to begin, as this year's XPD had the longest start to a race that I can remember, so lucky we had only made the decision to race 3 weeks prior otherwise it would have seemed like an eternity.

We arrived in Adelaide Saturday 31st August, where the team were met by Race Directors and media for a pre event photo-shoot at the Adelaide Cultural Centre, and local markets, where we met teams Soldier On and Girls on Top. 3hrs later we hopped onto the late bus, filled with plenty of excited adventurers to commence the trip up to Port Augusta. The trip was set to take over 5hrs.....

Gary and Slosly jumped off the bus half way to help out James the camera man, as he was falling asleep following the bus in a 4WD.....so Slosly took control.....the heat and flies were starting to become very noticeable. It was dark by the time we arrived, and we were dropped at our accommodation. We had to lug our gear about ½ a kilometre to the entrance.....and soon we were settled at the Oasis Apartments where we would stay until Tuesday. Instead of relaxing we went shopping, so that would give us more time in the morning for preparation of gear.



Early Sunday the boys went for a little jog.....testing out the Salomon XR Mission shoes while Jan and I went for a little ride around Port Augusta, it looked like we were already in the desert.....and it felt like it too. Sunday was registration, briefing, and competencies..... it almost took the whole day, we had to get our mandatory gear checked, do a first aid and navigation test as well. It was hot, hot hot.....and everyone was feeling it, so we were quite happy to jump into the freezing cold water for the kayak competency and do a swim, we had heaps of fun, anticipating what lay ahead.

We spent the rest of the afternoon sorting our gear and food as best we could. Monday came quickly and at 9am we all huddled into the Barracks at Port Augusta for the revealing of the course.....we were told we would have 13 legs, 750kms, start at Arkaroola and finish at Port Augusta, but what was unique for this sort of race that we would not paddle the final leg and it would be 87km - with a dark zone! Soon after we had our maps it was a hive of activity in our room.....Gary & Slosly were going to share the Nav, so they were calculating our route while I was writing notes on the CP descriptions page while Leo was reading the notes in the course booklet.....a well organised team. Soon contacting was underway and then we commenced the most challenging part..... placing the gear in boxes.....this was by

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About Me



 Mountain Designs - Adventure Racing Team

the far the most stressful part of the preparation for me! So we planned leg by leg....food /gear.....food /gear! You have to get this right as a mistake could mean you have no shoes for a trek, or a vital piece of gear missing. Lucky for us Frankie (Leo's wife) cooked up a hearty meal for us, and she and Jan cleaned up around us as we were finalising our boxes.....we finished at around 10pm.

Tuesday was travel day.....yes we still had 24hrs till the start.....so at 9am team all piled onto busses to head out to the start at Arkaroola, we had two stops along the way I am sure that the temperature was close to 40 degrees. We jumped off the air-conditioned bus at 3pm and were totally inundated with flies and heat..... we purchased some fly nets and cut our buffs in half and sewed these onto the back of our hats.....we had totally underestimated the desert conditions. We were treated to a big BBQ before and spent the night in tents....just 12hrs till race start! In the morning we pack up the tents, put gear in boxes, had a big cooked breakfast, then, finally the race begins.....



Leg 1 TREK - Arkaroola to Wooltana Station – 29k



Well almost.....the start was up on top of Acacia Ridge.....1hr walk away.....so all the teams had to walk there first.....the race commenced with a special remembrance ceremony for Team Discovery who lost two team mates early this year. So about 30minutes after this ceremony the hooter sounded and the race officially started! We had a rogaine, so we had to mark up a map with CP's and collect some of these on the way to CP1. It was a scorching day; Leo did not have a good night as he was coming down with a cold, so we took things steady, as we climbed up and down steep rocky outcrops. There was plenty of media attention as we neared CP1 and ventured down the George.....there was no water.....and temperatures were rising! Team Outer limits were hot on our heels and we travelled up out of the George to CP 3. I asked the team to stop here for a moment to attend to a bit of a hot spot on my feet, which I am now so glad I did, as so many people suffered from blisters from this first leg. We had a pretty tricky technical descent down a really steep rocky slope, and were lucky not to get cliffed-out. It was so hot that we stopped a few times to dip our caps in tiny water holes, and at Arkaroola Springs we refilled our water bladders and jumped into the water! We didn't care that we were totally soaked as it was just so hot and dry! Leo was really struggling, so we kept a steady pace, and somehow were still in front of the rest of the field. We climbed up to CP4 where we could see all around us, we had certainly opened up a bit of a lead and could see Outer Limits were at least 10 minutes back. As we approached the TA the excitement mounted as I think this trek had taken longer than anticipated.

Leg 2 MTB – Wooltana – Lake Frome – 48k

We tried to get in and out of the TA before Outer Limits arrived, but Slosly had a few bike issues, and Leo, who was not feeling great, tried to fix it.....so unfortunately we were beaten out of the TA. It was probably now about 3pm and it was still hot, dry and dusty. The bike course was flat and the road corrugated, but travel was extremely fast. Leo was feeling much better on the bike, and Slosly was doing the Nav. We were in great spirits as we passed Outer Limits about 10 minutes into the ride! We could not seem to shake them for a while as we kept getting to these tricky sections where the tracks would disappear, so we would all be togetherThis happened several times. We were beginning to think that we would finish the bike in daylight, but the track to the TA was non-existent, so on went the AY UP lights and we spent the next hour riding through desert sand and shrubs to get the TA. We arrived to find an electric dingo fence separating us and the TA.....lucky we did not try to go through it....it was on! Our boxes had not arrived so we had to wait 15 minutes.....we were given a time credit and thus had an 8 minutes lead on Outer Limits.

Leg 3 TREK – Lake Frome (The Salt Lake) – 51k

This was going to be challenging as we had to Navigate to an Island in the middle of the lake which was 30k away. Slosly was the main navigator for this leg as it was now dark, and we all tried to set our compasses to the same bearing. We were stride for stride with Outer Limits for the first couple of hours, and then we decided to lift the pace. Leo was given the job of pace setter as he was not feeling 100%, so we would run 100m, walk 100m at his discretion, so he could stay within his comfort zone.....soon we were running more like 800m and walking 100m... Leo was on fire! We were also now navigating by the stars.....lights were off and we were lining ourselves up with a little cloud of Milky Way just above the horizon. It was still incredibly hot, and managing fluids was still really important, I could not think of eating anything salty, as I feared running out of water. After about 5hrs we started to see something in the distance....could this be our island????? Yes it was! We hit the island and started looking for the CP.....we thought we were exactly in the right spot and commenced

Over the past seven years Team Mountain Designs have dominated Australian Adventure Racing. In fact Team Mountain Designs was the most "winning" team from 2003 -2010. The new look Team Mountain Designs will draw on past racing experience to set new goals and be one of the highest performing teams in the sport of Adventure Racing. Our Vision is to perform at speeds normally reserved for on road terrain while maintaining world class navigation skills.....and we will do this with a smile on our face! Our community vision is to give back what ever possible to a sport that has given us the opportunity to achieve goals beyond our dreams. It is this vision along with support from our partners and sponsors that will allow us to pass on valuable knowledge to aspiring Adventure Racers. Check out our website:- <http://www.triaventure.com.au/teammountaindesigns.html>

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our search, we spent about 5 minutes scouring every tree on the edge..... just as we saw the lights of Outer Limits approaching..... we continued heading round the corner of the island and found the CP.....so all together again. Leo takes off again.....this time he keeps running, we can see a light in the distance....we think this must be the TA, but it is still 20k away.....so we just keep moving forward! Suddenly the ground becomes damp and soggy and we are walking in water.....it's ankle deep and freezing cold.....so out came the arm warmers, jackets etc.....and we kept walking.....wondering how deep it was going to get.....1½hrs later the water subsides and we are still looking at the light of the TA.....it does not seem to be getting closer! It starts to get lighter and lighter and finally we start to get closer to the TA, and arrive at about 7am.....we looked a treat.....with the lower half of our bodies encrusted in salt.....Gary helped my get my gaiters off as they were solidified!



Leg 4 – MTB Lake Frome – Wirrealpa -90k

It was a beautiful clear day, and it seemed a bit cool, surprisingly.....I had to borrow Leo's arm warmers. We were all in great spirits as we headed out of the TA, and Leo was happy to be on the bike again.....Sloshy was getting his head around the maps. This ride was tough as it just got hotter, drier and sultrier as the day went on, and as there was not much change in terrain were quite uncomfortable on our seats....not to mention hot foot.....we had 2 CP's to find on this leg, one at a bore and one in a fridge in a shearing shed. We filled up water at the bore and travelled toward the TA.....just as we were getting close a plane was flying loops around us.....I said to Gary "do you think this plane is hassling us"? When we arrived at the TA we found it was the property owner out looking to see how far away we were....he was pretty excited to see us!

Unfortunately when we arrived we had 'No BOXES' so another wait.....1hr and 8 minutes this time.....without our proper food and gear....but we would be given another time credit. So Leo had a shower, aired his blistered feet (he had been hiding this from us), and we lay to rest inside the shearers quarters on a cold concrete floor! We were restless and could not sleep, but when our boxes arrived it was all happening, we packed away the bikes, in preparation for the toughest navigational trek of the event!

Leg 5 – TREK – Wirrealpa – Angorichina – 38k

It was about 2.30pm as we set off on this leg.....we didn't realise it was so hot.....and it was not long before we realised that our forced stop may have been a bit of a blessing in disguise. Gary was suffering a bit in the heat so we backed off the pace, Leo was coping with not only a cold, but severe blisters as well.....we nailed CP 13 before dark and as Sloshy was on fire, Gary handed him the maps! We approached the water point just on dark and were pretty excited to find not only water but a bottle of coke here for each team. Now the nav was getting pretty tricky, so it was a relief to find CP 14! Sloshy was now finding it really challenging as we were into our 2nd night and we had had no sleep....and poor Leo was fading as the hours passed by. We were all falling asleep and we were bamboozled trying to find our way to CP 15 as nothing was making sense. I lost my trekking poles somewhere at this point, and we were not about to try to find them as we had no idea where we were. So we headed west on a safety bearing to hit a trail and find a shed.....but could not find them either, so we ended up sleeping in a creek from 2am – 4am. Now we know why we didn't find that shed..... (as we actually had walked straight past the CP in the dark thinking we were 2km further south....everyone back home watching the spot trackers must have been beside themselves watching us do circles at this point). When we woke up we continued west to find a main road, and worked it all out.....we found the water point then tried to attack the CP from the other direction....despite the fact that it was now light, it still took two attempts to find it. We were so relieved, but had lost crucial time.....we wondered if other teams out there were having trouble too, had Outer Limits passed us by through the night? We were close to the TA now and the boys thought they could see a camera man on the hill and thought it was moving.....it was just a power line marker..... We picked up CP 16 on our way to the TA. When we arrived the officials raced out so excited.....apparently we were still in the lead.....we were surprised! Outer Limits had pulled out after CP13 due to blisters and, all other teams, according to trackers, were now over 5hrs behind.....Craig & Louise came in to say hi and ask us what happened out there.....as we had certainly been much longer than anticipated. We unpacked and set up our bikes, signed out of the TA and went to the shop across the road.....we ordered pies, pasties, ginger beer, iced coffee....well deserved!

Leg 6 MTB Angorichina – Heysen Range -68k



We were certainly in great spirits now and very excited to be in the lead.....Leo was in great spirits (now off his feet) and we all enjoyed the trails....as this was the first true type of trail riding that we had done so far.....we actually looked forward to the small hills and climbs along the way, as the descents allowed us to stop pedalling for a few moments. We were motoring along and found the CP's without any troubles! It was not long before we were at the water point, we did not need to fill our bladders, but filled bottles just to pour over our heads. With about 20k to go we hit what seemed like an oasis, trees, creek crossings and lots of shady bits.....however it was like a sauna.....my bike computer read 36 degrees.....and it felt like it too! With just 10k to go we stopped for 2 x 5 minute breaks in the shade just so our core temps would not rise too much. The final bit of trail into Wilpena Pound was awesome, as the temperature dropped our speed increased....we surprised the TA officials once again as we were well ahead of

schedule. Here we met Jan and James with their camera and the Wild Racers film crew.....we were pretty relaxed at this stage and probably took a little long in transition, chatting to everyone there.....maybe something to do with being out on course with no other teams around us.....we were very excited to be in the lead at XPD!

Leg 7 TREK Wilpena Pound – 23k

We set off back to the camp ground and stopped at the café for ice blocks, toilet stops etc. I thought we were taking a bit long so I said to the boys' you know what since we have hit the lead' we have been stuffing around, and if we want to make that dark zone we can't afford to become too complacent, or we will lose our lead" So off I went..... set a cracking pace up to St Mary Peak pass, it was a steep climb and I was loving it....for some reason I did not seem tired at all. We were so lucky to do this part of the trek in partial daylight as there were spectacular views and as we reached the top we were treated to an amazing sunset out to the west....the sun was so big and massive!



The rest was all downhill and we tried to run when we could, I was pushing Leo and the boys and tried not to let the pace drop too much, so it was a mix of walk/run/ walk/run etc....just like what we did on the salt lake. CP 24 was out at sliding rock, on a viewing platform....but no view.....so we high-tailed it back to the TA. The final part of this run hurt, but now all we had to do for a while was ride to ropes then to mid camp.....so we were further than halfway. Back at the TA we had a much faster Transition this time....in and out in less than half an hour!

Leg 8 & 9 Mtb 20k Ropes 8k Mtb 54k

It was approaching midnight, so we were now getting a bit sleepy as we had really only had 2 hrs sleep, it was now also getting a bit cold....so we decided to play a few racing games along the way to the ropes, as most of this ride was on the tar.....think we hit over 50k/hr at some point....we had unleashed the Monster (aka Gary). At the ropes TA we were told it would take just over an hour to get there on foot and that it was a bit steep in parts....well that was an understatement, it was like a rocky scramble most of the way, as we followed bits of pink tape through rocky crevices....we had no idea where we were going and could not see much at all....we were all falling asleep. We thought Slosly was seeing the sleep monsters big-time, as he saw a red rope, lights and 'heard someone just ahead'.....we had just convinced him that he was seeing things when we arrived and he asked the ropes guys...was there a red rope on the track?....yes they said....Slosly was relieved...he was not going crazy after all. We were now excited but tired, we were trying so hard to listen to the instructions, but every time there was an opportunity to curl up on a rock and sleep for 30 secondswe did. We got hooked up onto our ropes one by one and commenced the climb....Slosly, Gary, me then Leo..... It took me a bit to get going but then I got the hang of it. Unfortunately we could not see a thing at all it was pitch-black out there.....so when we reached the top the abseil down was fun and not scary at all.

As we headed back to the TA we were like drunks, wandering all over the

place.....we were lucky to make it back the TA without falling off the side of a cliff. We had a 30minute sleep before we set off on the bikes again as riding at this point would have been dangerous. We left there at 4.07am. It was now freezing....the weather had changed, so out came the thermal top, the jacket, and my beanie! We were awake now and the sun was starting to rise as we were approaching the Chace Range, we were looking for the track through the saddle. It was a steep climb, and we could not ride the whole way, Slosly got a flat, but the goo in the tube worked, so we set off down the other side with Leo showing off his downhill MTB skills. We had a bit of trouble working out the trails here....but found the pipeline track and soon we were at CP29 'the ruin'.....lucky we did this part in the light.....so our sleep earlier had seriously helped us! It was only 25k to the TA and for some reason it felt like it was downhill all the way.....so we were flying, and even I did a few turns and got a few pushes from Gary too. We were getting excited as we were so close to mid-camp. We rocked in at 8.32am awesome – we know knew that we had a chance hit the paddle a few hours before the dark zone.....just had to get through a 155k bike and 51k trek.....anything could happen but we were thinking positive. Shower, bacon & eggs and a compulsory 6hr sleep.....heaven!



Leg 10 MTB Mawson Trail - 155k

There were 8CP's to keep us excited along the way, a few hills but mostly flat, Slosly, Leo and Gary were on fire and I was just sitting on the back.....we were going mostly over 30kph and the hours and k's were flying by. We kept seeing signs to Quorn, but not the way we had to go, as we were following the famous Mawson Trail. We hit the Quorn pub at 8pm, and found the CP at the railway cart! Slosly went into the pub looking for food, and ordered hot chips.....5minutes they said.....30minutes later finally they came out.....I was getting a bit edgy as I was thinking we are just wasting time.....forgetting that the boys need to eat more than me.....I'm a bit of a camel! We were soon back on the road again and the boys were all fuelled up....we were now going even faster as it was now just 40k to the TA and the final trek was approaching. When we arrived at Wilmington Hall, the officials were still asleep and the lights were out, as they did not expect us till 2am.....we were getting faster now as we also know that the Bivouac Colts were having a comeback, and we really needed to get the paddle start before dark the next day.....but a 51k trek that was meant to take at least 13hrs was still threatening to spoil the party. So we had another quick transition and left at 11.22pm

Leg 11 Trek - Mt Remarkable 51k

Now Slosly was on the maps again and had said this trek had some hills. We encouraged Leo to once again set the pace, and to run a bit.....as it meant we would just get there faster.....both he and Slosly had bad blisters. So this is the point where I started to get excited, I just tried to keep the pace up, whenever it was flat, downhill or not too steep I was running and the boys just had to keep up. We had 5 CP's on this trek, two were in creek junctions, one at a hut, one at a creek bend and the other right on top of Mt Remarkable. We found CP 39 and 40 quite early on and then we had a 13km downhill runyes 13km.....my knees were aching so much I had to slow to a walkWe were all falling asleep again so Gary was singing Peter Allen's 'I go to Rio' and dancing all the way down the hill....we were playing name games to keep stay alert! We hit Alligator Gorge in the dark.....it was so amazing, and awesome running and rock hopping along flat rocks.....lucky it was flat and dry! Out of the Gorge we had a trail run to Blue Gum Flat, and 7k seemed to take forever on the windy trail....we all were taking turns on the front to keep up the pace. We hit CP 41 just on daylight and commenced the climb up the ridge of Mt Remarkableover 800m of climbing....again somehow I was on fire and setting a cracking pace.....poor Leo just had to keep up.....he was trying so hard to ignore the pain! CP 42 in the creek was just beautiful, it was lush and green and looked like a sheep's paddock in NZ.....but soon the terrain changed yet again on the final ascent up to the peak. We found CP 43 at the trig point and commenced the 7k descent into Melrose.....it was a single track all the way, and it was in full sun.....Gary and Slosly were playing aeroplanes in the background (falling asleep again) as Leo and I just kept motoringwe just wanted to finish. As we arrived in Melrose the town bell rang and all the MTB riders in town from an 18hr MTB race were all cheering us on! We had arrived before midday and paddle was now a reality....so another quick transition....and we were out of there.

Leg 12 MTB - The Bridle Track – 38k

Leo went into the café, purchased 4 paddle pops and we rode off with these in hand.....it was now super-hot again and the wind was behind us....but we set a scorching pace. We climbed up to the top of the range and we could see the ocean! The final descent into the Port Germien was awesome.....spectacular views and super-fast riding.....we hit the TA at 2pm.....mission accomplished....so we thought! Slosly was reduced to tears when he saw his wife Lea and son Kyson at the TA to greet him....a total surprise! Everyone was so excited for us to be in the lead...it was the best feeling ever!

Leg 13 Paddle – Spencer Gulf – 87k

It was a real challenge to get going, we knew we would not get to paddle far, as we would have to stop paddling at 6.15the dark zone!

So we packed food and water for our overnight camp, as we had a jet boil and dehydrated meals. What we did not realise is that it would take us another hour to get the kayaks to the water....as the tide was out! I am sure it was more than 1k....so we had to carry them all that way.....and it was so windy....thought we were going to get blown off the pier! I have no idea how we had any energy left.....but we found it somehow. At about 3.45pm we started paddling into the wind, it was very bumpy and I was totally soaked and freezing.....we made it to the sand bar and had another portage.....I had to put on a jacket.....and it did not take too long for Leo and Slosly to do the same.....Gary was super-human at this point! We lugged the boats over the sand bar and began to paddle as hard as we could, as we only had one hour. At 6pm we started to come in close to shore to find a spot to camp.....the tide was still out and it was a 400m hike back into the beach....Gary ran in and started a fire.....and I just stood there and warmed up as the boys brought in the boat and the gear! We had a great night under the stars and had 9hrs sleep. Gary announced that his new nickname was 'the fire walker' as he got up in the middle of the night and walked across the hot coals.....forgetting where he was and that we had a fire.....he was very lucky not to have severe burns! We were just packing up ready to get paddling in the morning when Craig & Louise turned up.....they had bad news.....the Colts had portaged all night and were now just 5k up the road, but there was a severe wind warning and that the paddle would have to be reduced. So we agreed to cut the paddle short but they still had to find the Colts.....they did, and we were picked up and taken to the TA loaded kayaks and headed north. The Colts had little sleep, and we had a 1hr 23 time credit as well as an extra 5k lead (which would equate to a 1hr head start for the shortened paddle).....so our lead was not threatened....as we got further North.....the conditions were severe!



So a decision was made to take us North of Port Augusta for a 10k paddle to the finish, and that we would start together, as our lead was impossible to beat realistically. So off we set finally, just 10k to the end of XPD....we had a tail wind and there were camera's everywhere as IRB's motored pastit was a very emotional paddle into the finish line.....we exited our kayaks arm in arm, with tears running down our faces.....we could not believe what we had just achieved as a team, not only had we finished for Sloslywe had won XPD Flinders Ranges – World Series International Adventure Race.



Thanks so much to all our friends, supporters and sponsors who have helped make a once in a lifetime opportunity a reality.....three weeks ago winning XPD was only a dream! Please support our sponsors Mountain Designs, Salomon, Hammer Nutrition, Ay UP Lights, and Tri Adventure.



Posted by Mountain Designs - Adventure Racing Team at 18:07 No comments: [M](#) [E](#) [T](#) [F](#)

Wednesday, 7 August 2013

Hells Bells 2013 - lived up to its name!

Dare You Adventure took over this event last year, and provided competitors with plenty of challenges, with the second half of the course being much tougher than the first and ten maps just adding to that challenge! So, when I heard that this year's event HQ was at Maleny, I knew it was going to be an epic....and it was!

Team Mountain Designs (Gary and I) both had rather different preparations! Gary had not done as much racing as me, after taking on his new venture – Ridgeline Adventures! So he had spent more time planning and preparing challenging courses for everyone else, doing heaps of strength training on the roadie, competing in Thursday Orienteering events and placing 3rd last weekend at the Australian MTBO Middle and Long Distance Championships in the Open Men's category. I had on the other hand done heaps of racing, teaming up with Leo Theoharis in 'The Culminator' (Ridgeline Adventures) placing 2nd overall and 1st mixed team category (3 wins from 3 in the series), and last weekend somehow managing a best time ever in 'King of the Mountain' (Sub 30 – 29.01) as well as placing 1st & 2nd respectively in the Australian Middle and Long Distance MTBO Championships Veteran Female Category.

