

Race report - Team Soldier On
Kimbo



The team:

- Olga, notfromvolga, notsovulgar, ultrakeenandenthusiastic, wowthisisawesome, elcapitan, Poberezovska.
- Fenno, whatsanadventurerace, waddlegimpman, Fenton.
- Paddy, dadjoketeller, moralechicken, toenail-lover, Howlett.
- Kimbo, flatpedalscanbecool, bygodhecansnore, navisfunwhenyouareshattered, Gilfillan

Summary:

- We didn't know each other but had a great time as a team!
- Limiting mistakes seems to be a good strategy.
- In hindsight I wish we had walked across the water!
- If you are holding a cricket ball in each hand, you have yourself a very large cricket!
- The hamster is dead, long live the hamster.
- I was a bit disappointed that the paddle was cancelled.

Pre-race titbits.

- Olga's organisation was amazing and we all arrived with everything we needed (well almost, but what's a bit of rushing around between friends?).
- We got a police escort to our Port Augusta accommodation... Ask Fenno.
- Great to see everybody at registration and competency - awesome camaraderie!
- We deal with nerves by just knuckling down and getting the chores done, but no one sleeps very well, especially in the bunk beds made for midget Carnies (Circus Folk you know, small hands, smell like cabbage...).
- The start wasn't much of a secret. Googling "SA Spectacular Location" took us to Arkaroola! Oh, and the bus driver may have mentioned where he was taking us...
- First impressions. Hectic treks, easy MTB, and a nasty paddle to finish.
- Detailed map reconnaissance of the areas where I thought Craig would provide maps that didn't do the real situation justice paid dividends later on!

- Arkaroola - slept under the stars (making the rest of the teams think we're "hardcore", as they sweated in their tents), watched a Kiwi chic almost paralyse herself by diving into the shallow end of a pool (not cool). My Lord, when will this race actually start!!!!



The Race - leg highlights.

Leg 1 - the heat.

- A memorial for two members of Real Discovery who died while training in Tokyo Harbour was quite moving, and a very respectful way to start the race.
- And then we were off into the 35 degree heat, a heat that my Canberra winter training had not prepared me for. 6L of water, and several rest breaks later, we re-stocked from a waterhole complete with dead wallaby. Pray, puritabs, pray!



Leg 2 - the fence is only electrified for you Paddy...

- a pleasant evening ride but for the last 4km off track through the salt bush to the TA. Olga fell over into a thorn bush and we spend some time removing 50% of the thorns. Never heard what happened to the other half!
- at the dog fence we all escaped unharmed except Paddy who managed somehow to wrap himself in all the strands and get zapped in the calf... I guess for some fatigue and coordination issues strike early.

Leg 3 - we are afraid of water...

- an awesome walk across Lake Frome arriving at the island CP at dawn. Majestic Sky. Neverending. Salt lattice painful on the feet. Fenno starts his gimp waddle walk. Never complains, just applies the cream and keeps going.
- Then a body of water!!!! WTF!!! Really deep!!! Forgot the Bear Hunt story and went around it. 6 hour mistake. Ouch. Had to go for the water point at Perseverance Dam. Even hotter off the lake. Shelter under some old corrugated iron for an hour. Walk for another hour and then shelter under a shrubbery for another hour. Anyway, we just get on with it.

Leg 4 - thank you tubeless tyres.

- tracks not as marked again - Craig Bycroft trademark. So some cross country searching for old tracks. Got lucky though and made up a few places despite a two hour sleep. Passed Bear Hunt head to head immediately after we got up... we are going the wrong way, thankfully only for about 50m. Wake up and check the compass Kimbo!!!
- Hit the TA just after dawn and prepared for the trek through Angorichina.

Leg 5 - sneaky peaky.

- Another hot day in the sun. We didn't move very fast. Olga was suffering pretty badly, but after a rest in the shade of a beautiful river gum and some precious water on a buff on her head she was right to press on (minus pack which the boys shared for the rest of the day - lesson for next time, Olga carries a small pack with not much in it).
- An amazing gorge with a little canyon up to the lowest saddle to take us across to the water point, and there is Mawson.

- After the water point we pushed in up into the high ground with another short break in a shady creek-line before climbing the ridge. At least there was wind on the ridge. We made the CP about 15 min before Mawson and then headed into the low ground. We knew the next CP would be one of the hardest to find, especially in the dark so we pushed harder than at any other time in the race. We made the CP just before last light. We had seen a team behind us just short of the CP, so we took a sneaky peaky low ground route to the west to avoid silhouetting ourselves and giving the position of the CP away.

- Pretty smashed by the time we made the TA so we had a longer transition than usual, a hot feed and a couple of us got some sleep. I couldn't get into my bike shoes but remembered that I had some flats in my box, so flats and trek shoes it was for the rest of the race. Hurray for the feet!

Leg 6 - Kimbo's seat goes vertical...

- we head off but are all still pretty bushed, so we take a two hour sleep once on the Heysen trail. The trail is awesome, pine forest and greenery, a massive change from the arid first few days.

- just after we wake and are heading south again, Kimbo forgets he is on flats, tries to jump a small creek, loses his pedals, comes down hard on the seat... Not sure whether that hurt or not because I then realise that my seat is almost vertical. I keep riding, in a sort of strange position, for the next while until we have a break. I whip out the multi-tool but despite loosening the seat, can't move it. Bigger, 40km to go to Wilpena. No bike box there either. Then another 60km to midcamp. Mildly annoying and not particularly comfortable.

- But the track is beautiful, especially coming through the Bunyeroo Gorge and then up the Wilcolo Creek. Watching the sun crest on Mary's Peak was special and then the single track into Wilpena was awesome.



Leg7 - a special place full of giraffes...

- a great walk through the Pound. What a fascinating natural rock formation!

- another hot day though. We seem to do all our trekking in the heat of the day...

- Paddy has had a mediocre run with dad jokes up to this point, but comes out with a pearly about a cricket with large balls. It may have been delirium but it seemed pretty funny. Shortly after that we started seeing giraffes...

- the shop at the information centre cops some abuse, in both the fiscal and olfactory senses - we were pretty on the nose by this point! And, Olga decided that she had a craving for baked beans which of course only added to the problem.

- on the short walk back to the TA we find some emus. Next thing, Paddy is on his back with legs in the air hooting, carrying on like a pork chop and slapping his hands on the ground. Not sure what that was about - he claimed it was an emu mating call but they didn't look convinced and buggered off...

- back at the TA and I still can't fix my bike, so off we go (after Olga had a short nap on the cool concrete veranda).

Leg8 - hard to be too afraid in the dark...

- we arrived at the base of the cliff just after last light, so the rope climb was in the dark. I appreciate that the rope climb was available 24 hours, but it would have been great to do it in the daylight. Perhaps there are some options to consider for similar activities in the future - potentially a 12 hour rogaine in the vicinity that would allow teams to choose when to get controls and when to arrive for the activity?

Leg9 - a momentary lapse of reason (consciousness).

- we left the roping TA hoping to make it to Midcamp before first light. After some serious hike-a-bike to get over the Gregory Gap saddle, and a short diversion due to a "No Public Access" sign which we belatedly assume does not apply to us, the tracks in the next valley were of course unlike the map. But we made it to the right spur and I was 95% confident of our location, so we headed down the track next to the gas pipe line and get to the creek line. But it's not doing the right thing. We search in vain for a few minutes and I am starting to doubt the "known position". I'm also starting to lapse in and out of consciousness while I discuss the issue with Paddy. As Olga has already been asleep on her bike for an hour, I decide that we will return to the known point and sleep. We got three hours and then found the CP within five minutes at dawn. In hindsight I should have just taken a powernap to get the brain working properly again.

- so we make midcamp at 0830, now well rested. The extra sleep does mean we can still get three hours here as well as focus on some other admin, like fixing my bike which is actually pretty easy with some basic tools...

Leg 10 - where is the hard bit?

- a great flat ride with awesome views of the ranges, the water point 90km into the ride has no water, but we press on and hit Quorn in six hours. By now I am concerned that Craig has something in store for us between Quorn and Wilmington (the course booklet gives 14-26 hours for this leg and we are 2/3 of the way through it in six hours). So I take a 10 minute nap while the others feast in the pub.

- off we go again just behind That's Cray, but there is nothing complicated or hard and we are in Wilmington 2.5 hours later for a 9 hour total leg. We have some of my wife's magic hedgehog slice, a quick nap and then we are ready for the big hike.

Leg11 - the hamster is dead, long live the hamster!

- the last trek leg through the Mount Remarkable National Park. We had taken a 30 minute sleep in the TA and were intending to push through to try and get as much time as possible in the Kayak TA before commencing the long paddle at dawn.

- Shortly into the trek though and Olga is already asleep. We wake her up briefly and she reports that her hamster is dead. We are a little confused by this, but it turns out that she has (or rather had) a hamster running around inside her head. The hamster is now dead and naturally we are concerned. But Olga goes back to sleep before we can get to the bottom of it.

- but we don't want to stop or proceed at zombie pace and need to get her to wake up. I vaguely remember something from biochemistry... I prod Olga into semi-wakefulness and give her a can of redbull, then keep walking next to her mumbling something or other. After I yell "SNAKE" Olga is now very awake, quivering and close to hyperventilating. I demand that she drink the redbull. She eventually complies. It seems to work as she is wired for the next 15 hours. I am worried though about what kind of form the inevitable crash might take...

- a beautiful walk through Alligator Gorge, then a long climb up the slopes of Mt Remarkable. The ground is very rough under foot and we are all suffering. At a break, Paddy pulls his toe bandages off and almost vomits. Just pack them back up we tell him, not much we can do here. But we contemplate asking if the medic could meet us at the Kayak TA to have a look at them - we are a bit worried.

- I need a 10 min powernap at the top of Mt Remarkable, it's amazing that you can sleep walk up hills in broad daylight. Anyway, best sleep I had on the whole trip! Then it's off down the hill to the TA. Each step is now exquisite agony, and worse for Paddy, but we press on. We are passed by Mawson approaching the bottom and can't keep their pace. On the way down this hill I'm pretty sure that Fenno's waddle is actually wider than the track! Amazingly Olga is still awake.
- at the bottom we are met by the NothinButShorts film crew who are impressed that we don't know that the paddle leg has been cancelled. Didn't we check the Yellow Brick. No... They want to know what we think. I don't think we managed to convey anything very coherent...

Leg12 - a race cut short.

- we do a reasonable transition and then press for home. The nav is supposed to be easy... but the climb up Horrocks Pass is the biggest (rideable) climb of the whole course! Then Old Springfield road is the bumpiest road/track of the whole course - pain and suffering for a sore behind (at least my seat was in the right configuration). And then finally, 135 hours of racing later and we are at the finish. Mawson has been on the couch for about 15 minutes, but we are very happy to kick them off quick smart and keep it to ourselves for another 8 hours till the next team comes in.

The aftermath

- Olga sleeps for 50 out of the next 60 hours. Trashed much?
- Fenno goes for vanilla latte followed by vanilla latte, oh and the gimp waddle disappears.
- Paddy develops cankles, but not as bad as the thankles that some competitors developed!
- Kimbo mulls over the salt lake decision.

Key points:

A great race and course, and we had an awesome time as team Soldier On. A big thank you to Craig and Louise from Geocentric, and an even bigger thank you to all the volunteers - you guys rock!

Magic moments

- Lake Frome at dawn.
- Approaching Wilpena Pound at dawn.
- Paddy doing an inverted Christmas beetle impersonation to attract an emu.
- Finishing as a team and exceeding our goals! Perhaps we will be back for more???

Raising awareness for Soldier On and the great work that they are doing for our wounded soldiers – thank you to all who have supported us and Soldier On. You can still donate here: <http://personalchallenge.gofundraise.com.au/page/SoldierOnXPDteam>

And finally, a massive thank you to our family and friends who have supported us. It is a big undertaking just getting to the start of XPD, and impossible without your willing and loving support!