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# Adventure Racing World Championships 2016 (XPD) - Mont AR race report



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Our excitement in hearing that 2016 XPD would be the AR World Championships was only surpassed by then hearing that the event would be located in the Shoalhaven region of NSW - a stunning coastal area in which we regularly train and holiday, only about 2.5 hours drive from our home city of Canberra.

Getting to the start line proved to be a challenge. Aaron dropped out of the team in August, having struggled with a calf injury for a few months and, being a new dad, not having enough time to commit to training. We were lucky that Canberran Paul Cuthbert agreed to take Aaron's place. Paul had not previously competed in an adventure race of any length, but is a super strong runner, mountain biker, orienteer and rogainer, so we knew he'd be fine as long as he learnt to paddle, and he diligently focused his training on this over the remaining months. Unfortunately, about three or four weeks before the event, Thor also dropped out of the team. Thor had been struggling with a foot injury for a few months, which got worse after the XTrail race in China. The Victorian rogaining championships was the final straw, with a strong performance but a seriously swollen foot, and a proper diagnosis saw her needing to wear a moon boot for a few months. At such short notice and despite our efforts, we couldn't find a replacement woman for Thor, but luckily for us, Canberra mountain runner Tom Brazier agreed to step in at last minute, enabling us to still start the race as a team of four. Tom had only previously competed in one expedition race - Wildside in 2014, but like Paul, is a very talented runner, mountain biker and navigator, so we knew we had a fast team but would be shifting to the all-male category.

Following the pre-race activities, including the prologue and the short 'lockdown' period in which to prepare our maps, we were soon at the starting line in Huskisson and heading out onto the first leg, a 35km paddle in Jervis Bay. This was Tom's first time paddling on the ocean, and he duly felt it, throwing up half a dozen times throughout the paddle whenever there was a bit of a swell. To Tom's credit, despite being unable to keep down any food or water, he would get back to paddling each time as soon as he'd finished throwing up, knowing the best cure to his sea sickness was to finish the paddle and be back on dry land. I was just glad to be sitting in front of him rather than behind! We went with 3 people in the 3-person yellow-boat, towing one person and 3 bags in the 2-person boat, and this seemed to work pretty well; despite Tom's sea sickness, we arrived at TA1 sitting somewhere around 35th position.

The second leg was a short 14km run from Huskisson to Erowal Bay, and we enjoyed jogging along the water's edge to Hyam's Beach, getting food and drink into us along the way, before heading up over the hill and dropping down to Erowal Bay. Towards the end of this leg, we passed a couple of teams including our main competitors in the all-male category, the fluoro-clad BMX Bandits.

We did another quick transition here and got out onto the third leg, a short 13km paddle across St George's Basin and along its entrance to Sussex Inlet. We were still sitting somewhere around 30-35th position here, and were glad to get across the basin in calm conditions - we later heard that teams behind us encountered difficult wind chop.

With a full change of clothes, we transitioned onto the first bike leg of the race, a 95km mountain bike ride that would take us south west, up to Pointer Lookout, before descending Florence Head and eventually concluding in Kioloa. We had a pretty good ride, making reasonable progress, but unfortunately during the night time made one of our 2 main navigational errors of the race, turning south a little early during the first half of this ride and spending 45 minutes or so correcting things. Luckily for us, our main competitors in the all-male category, BMX Bandits, made the same mistake, so we were together at this point. Following the difficult hike-a-bike down Florence Head, where we were caught in a bottle neck of about 7 or 8 teams, we eventually collected the remaining checkpoints and arrived in Kioloa on Friday morning, having fallen around 10 places in the rankings to mid-40s.

We next headed out onto the fifth leg of the race, a 38km coastal trek down to Bateman's Bay. This leg was a highlight for me, the coastline and beaches were beautiful and despite the heat, we made good progress along a coastal track, passing several teams along the way and putting some time into the BMX Bandits. We were also able to stop at shops in Kioloa and North Durras during this trek for coke, chocolate bars and ice creams. Good times!

Arriving at Bateman's Bay early Friday evening, we decided to push onto the sixth leg, a 37km kayak up river to Shallow Crossing. We would be paddling against the tide during this paddle, but the low tide was still 5 or 6 hours away, so we backed that we could get through the worst of the tidal-affected areas before the current would be at its strongest. With this being the second night of the race, we were starting to get sleepy here, but we had some music to play through a waterproof speaker, and this managed to keep us going to Shallow Crossing, arriving in light rain in the early hours of Saturday morning. We grabbed our first sleep of the race here in the tents that had been set up by the race organisers. Our sleep was well-timed; it rained fairly heavily the entire 2.5 hours we slept in the tent.

Heading out in the dark and drizzle onto the next leg, a 58km mountain bike ride to Yadboro Flat which involved climbing over 2000 metres, the rain soon stopped and the daylight dawned. There was considerable hike a bike on this leg, and also a lot of sticks and leaf litter on the trails. The navigation was fairly non-eventful on this ride as we comfortably collected the checkpoints, but unfortunately a stick caught up under my bottom bracket, severing the outer housing of my derailleur cable and severing some of the wire cable inside. Paul patched it up with some electrical tape, but the cable continued to lose tension, with me losing gears one at a time. Stopping again, this time Paul tied a dozen or so cable ties around the cable, and this seemed to hold the tension in the cable. I rode on, only using the three middle gears of my 1x11 cassette. With the amount of climbing involved in this leg, climbing the hills in a middle gear soon cooked my legs and I gratefully accepted some tows from Paul on some of the hills, Paul again demonstrating his amazing strength. Surprisingly, as we progressed through the ride, the derailleur cable appeared to actually settle, skipping less, and I found myself tentatively trying a larger range of gears as we rolled into Yadboro Flat.

Transitioning in the lunchtime heat on Saturday, we headed out onto the 45km trek across the Budawangs. Lee and I had done this exact hike around 18 months previously in training for 2015 XPD, so we were pretty comfortable with where we were heading. An advantage here was also knowing where all the water sources would be, so we were able to just take 2 bottles each rather than loading up several litres of water at the start, like some teams less certain about water sources would likely have done. Lee had been unusually struggling through the day, and this mystery was answered later that night when we discovered that what he thought was his chest strap rubbing, was actually a tick buried deep in his chest. Extraction of the tick with some tweezers did the trick, and Lee picked up again as the night progressed.

We wanted to get as far as we could through the Budawangs before the daylight faded, and after correcting following slightly overshooting the saddle track from Mt Cole to Bibbenluke, we were delighted to pick up the track across scrubby Mt Tarn without any trouble. After making it around Mt Haughton, we descended down onto Styles Plain as darkness set in. We lost the track at the northern end of Styles Plain, but like the last time Lee and I hiked this area, we simply cut across directly to the knoll on which the track crosses for the Hidden Valley turnoff, glad that Style's Plain was considerably drier than the last time we were here. Unfortunately we were to make our other main navigational error of the race up here, where, after locating the off-track knoll CP with ease, we headed north to intersect the track, but somehow in our tiredness, missed it and ending up in the creek east of the track. After some confusion and mapping the creeklines in the dark for maybe 45 minutes or so, Tom took the map and, confident with where we were, we climbed a knoll and spur to the north east, finding the track again not far from the turnoff to Mt Quilty. We followed Redgrounds Track to Nerriga, struggling with staying awake for most of this but still making reasonable progress.

After grabbing 1.5 hours of sleep on our bike boxes at Nerriga, and each gratefully devouring a bacon and egg roll that the local lions club was cooking at the Nerriga pub, we headed off on our bikes around 8am on Sunday morning for the quick 70km bitumen ride to Bungonia for the caving, arriving about lunchtime.

At Bungonia we quickly headed into the caves where we were to collect five checkpoints from the six possible caves. Our first cave proved a challenge - we were in Holland's Cave, but somehow we thought it was Acoustic Cave after misreading the number at the entrance. This

meant I was being encouraged to keep following a narrow passage deeper and deeper, while the checkpoint was actually at a higher level. My doubts that the checkpoint could be down here were confused when I found a lost ay-up bulb down here - clearly at least one other adventure racer had been in here, so perhaps it was the correct way?! Deciding the CP couldn't be down here and heading back up, we encountered another team who corrected us on what cave we were in and we soon found the CP at a higher level of the cave. This first cave had taken us 1 hour and 20 minutes, so we next headed for a cave that was only supposed to take 5 minutes, although would be hard to find the entrance. Losing some time here without finding the cave entrance, we decided to press on to the other four caves. Luckily we appeared to improve from this point, finding the CPs in the other caves relatively quickly, repressing any claustrophobic thoughts we might be having as we squeezed through one section called 'the flattener'.

We ended up arriving back at the TA after 4.5 hours, so we had around 30 minutes waiting until the mandatory 5 hours were up and we could access our bike boxes and other gear. I found this 30 minutes to be very enjoyable; I was able to relax as I sat down at a table to eat a dehydrated meal for once not in a huge hurry. Soon the 5 hours were up, and we transitioned as strong wind gusts blew away some of our equipment - at one stage we were running off into the bush to grab our maps and dry bags that had flown off in a powerful gust of wind, thankfully managing to retrieve them!!

We were now up around 20th position or so, and also knew we had a 2.5 hour lead over the BMX Bandits in the all-male category as we headed down into the slot canyon, passing Team Canada AR at the top of the descent after Adam's lookout. Following the canyon all the way to the Shoalhaven, we arrived at the packraft section right on 8pm, the time that the dark zone commenced. A team was already sleeping here, and we could see others coming down the White Track. We knew staying here for the full dark zone was not a good option, as BMX Bandits would catch us and be commencing the rafting next to us at the 5am lifting of the dark zone. So we started hiking down the western side of the Shoalhaven, finding the going surprisingly easy, with a reasonable track in many places. We hiked for around three hours, getting to about the 6th rapid or so, before deciding to call it a night and to grab a long, five-hour sleep on a nice flat patch of grass. We all slept fairly soundly here despite the cool breeze that blew throughout the night. We arose before sunrise and were on the water as soon as the dark zone lifted at 5am. No sooner had we started paddling when Lee and Tom decided to go for a morning swim, tipping their raft. A quick way to wake up, though Paul and I preferred to stay dry.

We thoroughly enjoyed this pack raft section, the rapids were great and we had a strong tailwind during the 14km of flat water at the end of this leg. Arriving at Talowa Dam around lunchtime, we were surprised to see Team Canada AR leaving the transition - they had hiked past us overnight while we slept. We headed out onto the next leg, a 56km kayak to Nowra, perhaps 20-30 minutes or so behind the Canadians. We thoroughly enjoyed the many rapids in the first half of this kayak leg, and during it we were somewhat surprised to come across the Canadians paddling upstream past us. We pointed out that Nowra was the other direction, but they were looking for CP39. Unfortunately for them, we were still actually quite some distance from that CP, at least several km. So we pressed on, leaving them to work out where they were. A few cold rain showers passed over us during this paddle, we stopped to put on our Mont Slinx fleeces, which did the trick in keeping us warm.

Chatting to a nice lady on a SUP on the river, we eventually arrived in Nowra, with a wild sounding party on the north side of the river yelling what were presumably words of encouragement as we paddled into the TA on the south side of the river. It was raining heavily here, which encouraged a quick transition as we also put on our rain jackets. Canada AR arrived in the TA soon after we arrived, however they had a hypothermic teammate so we could tell they were not leaving the TA in a hurry. Merrell also did an amazing job catching us here, however they too were staying in the TA for a long time, as they were waiting for the shops to open in the morning to buy a replacement derailleur. We are full of admiration for Merrell - such nice people, and many top teams, when unable to podium due to their mechanical problems, would have quit the race rather than continue to battle to the finish like Merrell did. Merrell are a fine example of the true adventure racing spirit.

We headed out onto the 13th leg of the race, a 99km mountain bike, probably around about 10pm or so, and enjoyed a clean run up towards Yalwal and along the edge of Morton National Park as we raced towards where the fire road would be intersected by Braidwood Road. Grabbing a CP near powerlines, we pressed on towards Boyd lookout, although the ride wasn't entirely uneventful; I had a nice stack when I wiped out in some sand, Paul's freewheel seized up which meant he had to peddle the down hills with brakes on (or lose his chain), and Tom was falling asleep and beginning to get some knee pain, which thankfully was taken care of by ibuprofen.

After a minor deviation where we took a wrong turn after Boyd lookout, we were caught by the young Kiwi team Cloud Base Nine. This was probably a good thing for us - the Kiwi's were moving faster than us which made us realise we needed to lift our speed, and their comment that they'd seen BMX Bandits at the last TA was extra motivation for us. We raced through the last of this stage with the Kiwis, arriving in the final TA a few minutes ahead of them.

Here we transitioned very quickly for the final, 18km trek to the finish, basically just swapping the bike shoes for runners, and ditching everything but our mandatory gear, a little food and water. We were motivated and feeling good, so we ran pretty much the entire leg, surprised when we bumped into the Kiwis again, who had somehow snuck around us and had started crossing Lake Conjola entrance first. My hopes that the entrance would be sanded up were dashed - the entrance was open, and with the high tide and wind chop, was actually quite a difficult crossing. We exited the water at the same time as the Kiwis, who started running down the beach, so we ran with them for a few minutes before deciding we would press and drop them. Paul, still as strong as ever, took my pack here - impressive because he was carrying his and Tom's gear in his pack already - and proceeded to take off down the beach. With no pack, I was able to easily increase my speed on the beach, as Lee and Tom shared Lee's pack and kept pace as well. The Kiwis were impressive in how long they continued to run to try to stay in touch, longer than we expected. But by the end of the beach we'd put a few hundred metres into them, and after rounding a rocky headland and running the next beach, we could see they'd eased up. We didn't realise that both teams also passed the Swedish Outnorth Adventure Team, who had headed up and inland while we ran the beach. We crossed Narrawallee inlet just as the Kiwis arrived at the other side, I took my pack back from Paul and we proceeded to run briskly through the streets of Narrawallee, Mollymook, and to the finish in Ulladulla.

Arriving at the finish line at 11.30am on Tuesday, after 118 hours and 59 minutes of racing, including 9 hours of sleeping, we were thrilled to finish in 19th position, which would later

improve to 18th position following allocation of time penalties to some teams above us. We had won the all-male category and were the first Canberra team to finish (and 5th Australian team), but we were most proud of being in the top 20 teams overall, mixing it with some very strong teams in the Adventure Racing World Series and finishing less than 24 hours behind winners Seagate.

I'd like to thank my teammates Paul, Lee and Tom. Paul was an absolute beast in his first adventure race; ridiculously strong on bike and foot, excellent navigator, a decent paddler and great company. For someone who stepped into the team 3 weeks before the race, and with basically no paddle training, Tom did brilliantly as well; his excellent running ability was no secret, but his cycling was also strong and he is a great navigator as well. His pushing through the ocean paddle while so sea-sick gave me no doubt as to Tom's toughness to finish the race ahead. And Lee was his usual strong self, pushing throughout to the finish and focused on fast transitions. He must've battled along with that tick in his chest for many hours; he's a tough nut!

Also, a huge thanks to our sponsor Mont Adventure Equipment. Racing in such quality gear we can trust is such a great advantage, and one we are extremely grateful for. Thanks Mont - we love your gear!!!

Lastly, a huge thanks to the race organisers Craig and Louise, all the volunteers out there that made the race happen, and finally, a big thanks to my partner Kath for following us at the race, including keeping our Facebook page updated and showing up at some of the later transitions - it was a real boost to see your face out there! Likewise to Lee's partner Jess and their daughter Clare, who showed up on the course, and Paul's family Tara, Zoe and Ella, who showed up at at Lake Conjola and cheered us through the suburbs to the finish. Thanks to these people also for being so understanding with our training needs over the months leading up to the race - I owe a lot of dinner-cooking duties!

And thanks to all our friends and supporters who followed the Facebook page and our tracking dot throughout the race; we hope we gave you cause to cheer, and not too much cause for concern! Until next time, Dane.

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**Mont Adventure Racing** Here is our race report [Dane Roberts Tom Brazier Paul Cuthbert Lee Rice](#). Thanks for the course [Craig Bycroft](#) [#xpdar](#) [#arws](#) and thanks for the support [#montadventureequipment](#) [#trustedinthewild](#)

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**Mont Adventure Racing** Nice report Dane, well done

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**Keith Conley** Terrific report Dane. Pleased to see Merrell got a mention for their good sportsmanship. I had to tell them on a coastering section that one of their boxes had gone missing. I was fearing a fierce reaction but they couldn't have been better about it.

Congrats on a great personal result and also one for Australia!

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**Tom Brazier** Can't believe what a pleasure it was to do this race (90% of the time), thanks for the guidance boys! 10/10 would recommend and do again!

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1 Reply



**Danielle Winslow** Great report, and great result. Good to see you representing a fantastic Canberra company too.

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**Gay Robertson** Thanks for sharing this Dane, it's a good read!

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