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AR World Championship 2016 Ulladulla Shoalhaven NSW



Well it was actually a relatively relaxed pre race having had the logistics planner for the past week or so. Really just meant we spent a lot of extra time packing and repacking and analyzing packing choices.

The prologue and opening ceremony on Tuesday evening was a great chance to mingle with some other teams and partake in some classic Aussie style fun Ð a handball competition, vegemite sandwich eating competition, beach esky and thong relay and surf life saving flag race. Bit of a laugh before the opening ceremony welcome, complete with Tim Tams and steak sangas.

We had sorted and packed all our gear into tubs and after registering and going through mandatory competencies Wednesday morning, we dropped our tubs and bike boxes off Wednesday evening. Quite civilized really.

Thursday morning 730am maps were released and we entered lockdown. A fury of marking the 2 sets of 39 A4 maps and discussing final team plans with the other 100 teams. Once this was done and boxes were loaded onto correct trucks or locations, 1015am we were on the bus to the start at Huskisson Jervis Bay



Team AdventureJunkie.com.au

- Hugh Stodart
- Josh Street
- Serge Kurov
- Bernadette Dornom

Leg 1 35km Jervis Bay Sea Kayak

Course & Navigation comments: Good weather made this navigationally easy with line of sight visibility to all the CPs and everyone but the leading teams just got to follow the leader. The biggest decision was whether to cut through the reef at a place called Longnose Point near the entrance to Jervis Bay. We went around on the way out but cut the corner on the way back when the gain was bigger. It was straight forward but could easily have gone wrong (which it apparently did for a few teams).

Time 4hrs 29min leg finish 5pm Thursday

1230pm Wow race start with 100 teams racing 500m down to the beach to jump in kayaks and head out onto Jervis Bay. A pretty impressive trail of kayaks snaking across the bay with a few dolphins and media boats for company. We were lucky with a good start and managed to stay in the top ten from early on.

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Adventure

We went with the 3 and 1 strategy D Bern Josh and Serge in the yellow Ôtoy boyÔ (and yes there were many other names this boat got called over the course of the event, not all of them printable) and Hugh on his lonesome in the front of orange and blue CTR. Josh and Bern never knew that all those Friday morning paddle sessions in the CTR which weÔd nicknamed in jest the Ôspeed machineÔ, that it actually was, relatively speaking, the faster boat. This combination worked pretty well for us, with Hugh for the most part wash riding the yellow barge. Once across the bay we worked our way around some spectacular beach spots with our Ôcheckpoint monkeyÔ Josh collecting the first CPs.

We punched into the headwind to return in 5th to the start/finish of the leg with familiar teams of Shutz, Adventure Medical Kits and Mountain Designs, enjoying a bit of friendly banter.



Leg 2 14km Coastal Trek

Just had to follow the coast collecting a few CPs on the way and then find our way through the streets & firetrails across to St George's Basin.)

Time 2hrs 14min, leg finish 7.15pm Thursday

Once the heavy boats were lugged up the hill and loaded on trucks we set off on the coastal trek. We took a more steady pace anticipating the race to come whilst a few teams tried to blow themselves up as they raced past us. An hour or so coasting along the beach before cutting inland across to St Georges Basin.



Leg 3 13km Kayak

With falling darkness we needed to be accurate finding the river entrance on the other side but navigation lights made this very easy.

Time 1hour 39min, leg finish 9pm Thursday

We paddled across the bay as the light faded and were lead to Sussex Inlet by the flashing channel markers.

Leg 4 95km Bike

Time 8hours 42min, leg finish 5.45am Friday

There was a confusing network of trails on maps that were quite hard to read (at least for old man navigators with failing eyesight). There were a couple of hike a bike sections across the highway and off an escarpment (more on this later). Misty weather made the riding a little slow at times as visibility under lights was limited.

We set off on this leg as the first night fell. We swapped positions with quite a few teams out there as we climbed up and down and up and down and even a bit of hike-a-bike under a highway.

Now we have heard of hike-a-bike before but climb-a-bike was a new experience. The section down the escarpment from Florence Head required some tough scrambling, and would have been even without bikes and at night! Certainly memorable as a long line of teams threw their expensive bikes up over and across rocks, trees and cliffs for a couple of kms.

Although we seemed to be passed by lots of teams throughout this leg our solid navigation (the ever consistent Hugh) and steady pace kept us just out of the top ten as we came into transition.



Leg 5 38km Trek

Time 7hours 52min leg finish 1.30pm Friday

Some off track sections, but mainly following formed tracks and through small coastal towns.

We left the transition with Team Peak Adventure we started the leg in the morning light, with some of Australia's best coastline and beaches to traverse. The Aussie team contingent was strong as we spent a fair proportion of this leg leapfrogging amongst the Aussie teams Shotz, Peak Adventure and Mountain Designs. It could really have been a Geoquest race at this stage. We would keep choosing slightly different routes and yet meeting back up further along the course.

It was really getting warm in the afternoon as we headed through a few more urban coastal areas, stopping only briefly for water refills and foot lubing. There was a novelty small river crossing where all 4 of us got in one of the triple toy boy plastic boats with 2 paddles. It was lovely surprise to see one of the only supporter signs out on course left by Bern's Batemans Bay cousin, cheering us (and sister Liz) on and even nicer to catch up to her as we came into the transition area (TA6).



Leg 6 37km Kayak

Time 5hours 15min leg finish 6.45pm Friday

Follow the river.

Well luck was on our side, even if the sleep monsters were also with us, as we had the tide and wind with us for the majority of this leg down the Clyde River, turning to a slack tide as we neared the end.

Leg 7 58km Bike

Time 7hours 45min, leg finish 2.30am Saturday

Again the main challenge was staying on the right trails. There was a little bit of route choice, but the main obstacle was steep unrideable hills.

An hour or so of dusk light before another night time bike ride and another lot of climbing on mostly fire or 4wd tracks through the Bimbermala National Park and the Yadoro State Forest. Now there might not have been anymore climb-a-bike sections but there were some seriously steep long and unrideable hike-a-bike sections that just seemed to go on forever.

We saw very few teams on this leg unlike the previous bike leg. We caught team Columbia going up a particularly steep long hike a bike section and seeing their lights appear as if in the sky ahead of us and we saw a couple of teams had pulled over to sleep by the track. We came into the TA surprisingly in 6th just as it started to rain. Seagate and Adventure Medical Kits were sleeping under the transition tent and as the rain got heavier we were happy to put up one of the supplied tents for our first sleep in nearly 48hours.

Leg 8 45km Budawangs Trek

Time 17hours 30min, leg finish 8pm Saturday

Following a track through the Budawangs. The main challenge was expected to be finding the turnoffs.

We may have been halfway through the legs but with some more challenging sections to come we knew that there was still plenty more race ahead of us.

Its pretty hard to wake up and get going after only 2 hours of sleep and Josh found it particularly hard as he had been feeling quite overage in the race so far. There was lots of moaning and groaning and dry retching on his part and although we are definitely not a quick transition team this one was particularly slow as we woke up, packed bikes and got ready for the trek.

Once moving though we were all grateful for the sleep and relatively refreshed with Hugh in particular looking forward to this leg as the Budawangs is his favourite spot to hike. Josh and Bern may have initially been skeptical of his judgment on this but throughout the leg realized this was a well-founded call. Hiking up to the Castle and through Monolith valley and past the Shrouded Gods was truly breathtakingly spectacular and a highlight for all on the race. We again saw a bit of Shotz and Peak Adventure as well as Torpedo 7 and Painted Wolf early on in the leg before getting a bit of a break on these teams as Shotz and ourselves managed to locate the overgrown trail. We trekked under some pretty impressive rock overhangs (a great place to come back and camp) as the afternoon temperatures started to heat up. We followed a rough track and then cut through bush to get CP28 at a knoll a few hundred meters off the track. We took a direct route off the knoll to cut back to the track but fell foul to the lots of incorrectly marked tracks on the map as we had been warned and after hitting the creek without sign of our track again eventually decided to backtrack to find our path again unsure if the track continued to be marked incorrectly.

The last 20km of this leg was on more formed tracks and bush roads on flatter terrain so we ran/shuffled for as much and as best we could to the Nerriga Hotel transition area.

Leg 9 70km Bike

Time 4hours 15min, leg finish 1215am Sunday

Very simple road ride

A straight yet undulating road ride into a headwind to get to Bungonia caves. It was a necessary transit leg. Keeping the sleepmonsters at bay was a priority as falling asleep on the bike never ends well. Hugh was struggling and after hitting the limit of coke, caffeine gels and no doze, we pulled off onto the side of the road for a 5minute power nap. This was enough to get us through the remainder of the leg.

Leg 10 Caving

Time 6hours 30min, leg finish 700am Sunday

We did not really know what this leg would involve before getting there but it ended up involving a fair bit of navigation and walking as well as caving.

So I guess we had it in our heads that when the mandatory 5 hour caving leg was estimated to take 3-5hours we anticipated strolling to a few tourist caves over 3 hours and then getting a couple of hours sleep. We were a bit wrong. The caves were actually quite challenging to find with a sketchy map, at night and sleep deprived (Serge battling some pretty big sleep monsters) we skipped one cave as there was a queue and promptly spent an hour searching unsuccessfully to find our first cave. We hit a bit of a low point until we finally got our first cave CP after 2hrs in what was quite a deep and impressive cave with the CP tucked away in a little hollow. This leg was requiring real concentration and focus! In doing so we bumped into other teams who were struggling just as much if not more than us to find the caves and this lifted us and we got on a roll and enjoyed the caving. Or should I say squeeze as we contorted and wriggled and squished ourselves into the caves to then find the CPs (not easy with a 2D map for a 3D space).

We completed the caving in 5hours but were ready for a rest so found a TA tent and slept for 1.5hours. Well Hugh didn't sleep so much as lie down wishing he could sleep and not so fun.

Leg 11 44km Pack Rafting

Time 12hours 15min, leg finish 715pm Sunday

Again we underestimated the walking part of this getting to the river as there was some route options (canyon vs a climb up and down).

Quite a challenging transition as we only had access to our bike boxes after the caving so needed to pack up our bikes, get out of caving gear, wake up and ensure we had all our gear for packrafting and raft, lifejacket, helmet, paddles, paddle clothing etc as we set off on foot from the transition.

We took the green track down to the river although maybe should have taken the bitumen road and collected CP 35 at a of lookout. When we got to the top of the descent down to CP 36, we left our packraft gear up the top (next to another teams gear who had done the same) just carrying our mandatory trek gear as we planned to go get the CP then return back up to continue across the top to follow the white track down to the river. On descending we saw Shotz who had planned to do the same but

halfway down decided instead they would continue along the slot canyon to get to the river and so were returning to the top to collect their left gear. We did question ourselves for a bit but stuck with original plan, descending down to CP36, then retraced steps picked up packraft equipment and continued down to the river. It was unfortunate to see a couple of teams walking in the opposite direction on this leg & one Swedish team had turned back as they may have forgotten helmets at the transition and torpedo 7 had turned back as they had forgotten to collect the first 2 checkpoints before the river. Whoops but a good example of how sleep deprivation affects you decision making capabilities and how careful you have to be.

Any debate about whether which route was quicker and whether we would lose time on Shutz and the couple of other teams ahead was put to rest as they turned up about 10minutes behind us at the river, with little difference between the route choices.

Once down to the river we finally got to set up and use our packrafts. Josh claimed rear paddler (aka comfy seat) in his packraft with Serge in the front and Hugh steering his boat with Bern. The front seat paddler was never going to be as comfortable as the back seat and although Serge might disagree Bern actually found it surprisingly not uncomfortable squashed in the front. In our limited pre race pack rafting practice we had decided not to use the Öbig black sausageÖ and use a large drybag with 2 packs in it for the front seat paddler. In hindsight the inflatable insert would have been a good idea as the hardness of the drybags/pack seats as we bounced, wriggled and dragged the rafts over the rocks of the rapids left a few holes in both rafts with JoshÖs taking on slightly more water.

The Shoalhaven River is quite spectacular with large cliffs/escarpments on either side. Again we were relatively lucky for the most part having a tail wind down the long stretches. At times you felt like your paddle did more when you held it in the air to catch the wind as opposed to pulling through the water.



Leg 12 56km kayak

Time 9hours 45min, leg finish 5am Monday

Follow the river – harder than it sounds at times.

We reverted to a 2 and 2 strategy with the boats this time to tackle the rapids with Josh and Hugh in the yellow barge and Serge and Bern in a green and white CTR. The 600m kayak carry to the river showed good team work as we stacked the two barges on top of each other and each took a corner with regular side rotations. Surprisingly after the pack rafts both the plastic kayaks suddenly seemed a lot sleeker than they had on previous legs. The little rapids on this leg initially helped keep us awake if not a little bit challenging at night guessing for the most part where the best flow was.

As it flattened out more this leg spelled the invention of the game ÖReal or Not RealÖ. 3am, 14hours straight paddling, Bern: Serge do you see that ship over there? Serge: Yes I do but given its in the paddock I think its not real. Bern: Hugh would you travel around Australia in a converted bus like that over there. Hugh: Maybe but thatÖs a houseboat. Not real. Although apparently the lions were actually real as there was a lion park along the river bank. Real

So after 15hours of paddling over the last 2 legs we were very relieved to be getting out of the kayaks but it was not a pretty sight as we tried to get out all feeling and looking about 80years as we limped, hobbled and groaned up the boat ramp still kayak shaped. Was great to be out of the boats but certainly took a while to get our land legs.

Leg 13 99km Bike

Time 10hours 32min, approx leg finish 3pm Monday

Straight forward nav following good quality trails (mainly).

Arriving into this transition we were looking forward to some much needed sleep to get us through the last day, having about an hour before getting going on the final bike leg.

A few more steep climbs early on & most of them ridable, and then a fair few kms up on the plateau. The kms slowly clocked by catching up with Shotz and the Estonian team as we approached CP43 which appeared to be missing. We wandered around and searched a few different creeks and back tracked a couple of times before finally agreeing the CP was actually missing. We took photos of the spot and sent a yellow brick message that it was missing. Despite being pretty sure we were in the correct spot it was a relief at the finish line to hear that it was missing and had subsequently been replaced after we went through.



(Final) Leg 14 18km Trek

Time 2hours 19min finished 5pm Monday

Subtle route choices through the towns but on the whole straight forward from a nav perspective.

With 4 teams all coming into the last transition area at about the same time we all knew this leg would be a bit of a *ÔsprintÔ* and hurt more than we wanted it to after close to 100hours of racing. We ran together swapping a few stories until we hit the beach where the other teams made a slight break on us. We spent the remainder of the leg chasing hard along the beach into a head wind trying to keep in touch. With a few kms to go we were surprised to find ourselves gaining on Shotz, doubling past them at the last checkpoint less than 100m behind. We finally finished, very much spent, a tantalizing 10sec behind our Aussie competitors in 7th.

Very stoked with a fantastic result but oh so close with teams 4th to 7th separated by a mere 9min. Lovely champagne and pizza in the finisher lounges swapping many a story while battling to stave of sleep.



Race stats/facts

Trek 115km

Bike 322km

Kayak 185km

Caving 5km

Total sleep Ɖ 4.5hours. NOT MUCH

- Caffeine gels consumed (in the large part by Serge) Ɖ all that we had with us and IŐm sure more than the recommended dosage
- Bern still loves her jam croissants and they do get better with time spent in a black tub, squashed in a backpack and baked in a back pocket.
- Animals seen Ɖ dolphins, wombat, kangaroos, leeches, jumping fish, water dragons, monitor lizards, lions and a few pink unicorns overnight.

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