

Tri Adventure Antelopes Race Report XPD10 – Bay of Fires, March 2018

The tour guide at Port Arthur said the Aborigines had been in Tasmania for over 5000 years, deep time is how he phrased it. This year's XPD marked deep AR time for both Damon and Dave. Damon was about to become a legend of XPD if he completed his 8th XPD attempt, including three wins. Dave was taking on his 6th XPD attempt with two wins. Liz was doing a good job of hiding any pressure after competing at XPD9 and a recent top 10 at coast to coast. Tom was a bit nervous, he should have been as this was his first XPD.

Something came up and Thunderbolt couldn't race XPD10. They had already entered and looking for someone to sit in for them was the catalyst that got the team together. Thunderbolt 2 would have been an easy team name option as we had a token Dornom. It was through the efforts of Dave and his wife Lea getting the team organised and proposals written. Somewhere in there the name antelopes stuck. Jan got in touch from Tri Adventure in Noosa with some kit, Sholtz came on board with some gels and the Tri Adventure Antelopes were born, full sized though. The whole team had never raced together before but Damon and Dave had raced the previous 2 versions of XPD together and everyone except Dave raced together in the 2017 edition of Geoquest.

To say the team was organised would be an understatement. We all come from different states, Dave from Queensland, Liz from Victoria, Tom lives in a car and Damon lives in a bubble. This aside, through messenger and the odd email everyone was basically packed except for food by the time we all arrived in St Helens on Friday afternoon. The initial chat about the pre-released logistics planner was mostly around the shorter first 5 legs and the sleep strategy based on the fact the longest, highest and coldest trek leg 8 would possibly go through the second night.

Saturday morning was civilised with a 9am registration, mandatory gear checks and a few pop quizzes at race HQ. We found out leg 1 and leg 3 paddles were both cancelled due to strong offshore winds. Each check in station attendant was also a race volunteer that we ran into whilst out on the course which was nice, like catching up with old friends. Highlights of check-in were trying out our bothy bag which can now be used as a mandatory shelter and learning the rules from the race referee. To be honest the rules part wasn't a highlight but the volunteer race referee is also the organiser of Adventure Race Croatia so he deserves a mention. We got back to our accommodation around lunch time, packed, dropped our boxes back off at HQ and had enough time for cooking with Liz followed by Forest Gump.

Sunday morning was also civilised with lock out being moved forward nearly two hours after the cancellation of the paddle legs. Everyone was seated in their designated area, surrounded by gear, waiting for proceedings to start. It was our first address from the geocentric outdoors couple Craig and Louise. With the race now in its tenth edition and geocentric being highly regarded, XPD has obtained a cult following. Cults are strange things and they attract all types of people but we were all getting along and more concerned with the wind and pelting rain. Craig is a man of few words and added only slight detail to the briefings from the previous day. The start would be at a secret location and leg 2 was basically cut in half. Maps were handed out and we got frantic with our pens similar to a year 12 exam. We managed to get everything marked up and contacted the maps we could before the bus left a couple of hours later for the start.

Leg 1 - Bay of Fires Paddle, Cancelled

A paddle down the bay of fires would have been a great way to start but the wind was howling offshore. The Wild Yaks must have felt this change the hardest seeing as they had Stewart Bennett in the team. It was nice to keep the paddle gear dry for a while which came in handy for leg 7.

Leg 2 - Beach Trek South of St Helens, 10:45am-12:30pm Sunday

The bus left at 10:10 for the secret start location. Geocentric should not go into the kidnapping business as we could see out the windows and the bus took us to the south side of the bay from St Helens. Each team picked up two GPS bricks plus we already had individual arm bands from the lock out. We all headed down to the dunes which felt alot like an orienteering start. The mayor from the local council was there to welcome us and unfortunately we were not started with a shot gun. We were mainly sheltered from the offshore wind but if you got caught in it, the gusts were solid. Rain came and went but overall it wasn't cold and the team was keen to get a good start.

The leg took us up the coast and around into the St Helens inlet in a classic coastal leg, we were never far from the water. The team took the first two controls without issue but the Wild Yaks and us managed to overshoot the third control and the race stayed bunched up for the rest of the leg. It was a good opportunity to have a look at the other teams and see how everyone was moving. Liz and Tom

are both single so this was also a good chance to check out the Nordic Islands Team. They were here with two new racers as basically a team building exercise before organising the upcoming Nordic Island Adventure Race.

George: Hi Boss.

Boss: Hey George.

George: How was your weekend?

Boss: Really good George, thanks for asking. Hey I forgot to tell you but we have team building this week.

George: Ah great, love team building.

Boss: Yeah I know, anyway it's a 5 day nonstop race where you may end up shitting your pants.

The leg finished with Dash coming into transition slightly ahead of us but before we knew it the TA was packed.

Leg 3 - St Helens Inlet Paddle, Cancelled

The paddle would have been into a death headwind, think paddling Molokai backwards.

Leg 4 - St Helens to Scamander Ride, 12:30pm-3:00pm Sunday

We managed to get on the road first and clear of the other teams. The team was on the same page in TA with everyone being ready at the same time. Dave took the front, powering through the first few kms of headwind around the lake. After a short stint on the main highway we were on fireroads heading up in altitude then down the coast in direction. Dave and Damon made short work of the nav and apart from a few pinch climbs and the odd creek crossing the leg went well. We spotted Tim and Teagan before they saw us which had us wondering if the tracker was working. After a couple of hours we were headed for Scamander to punch the final control on a windy bridge with the TA in sight on the river bank. The TA at Scamander was full of volunteers but they kept to their shelter as a rain squall came through and hung around during our visit. We did manage to hear someone say that our dot was ahead of the other dots which didn't matter too much as we were still racing daylight and keen to push on.

Leg 5 - Scamander River Paddle, 3:00pm-4:45pm Sunday

The first 500m of the paddle was into a strong headwind so everyone put their head down. We were not wearing any paddle specific clothing which paid off as the wind died and the sun came out after about a km of paddling. We made a point to stop and eat and got through the control free leg relatively unharmed. In the last few hundred meters the rain started again and the wind picked up which left us quite cold coming into TA. Liz also managed to get stung by 2 wasps but the mood lifted as we all got changed under the shelter and the sun came back out. Teagan and Tim were there again, they were our biggest supporters to date but they would have competition.

Leg 6 - Scamander River to Fingal Ride, 6:51pm-11:30pm Sunday

If you are a Tasmanian kid then the St Marys pass is etched in your memory. You remember the spew coming out of your mouth and all over your dad's car as he towed the caravan up the east coast for the yearly family holiday. We were going the other way during the first part of leg 6 and the climbing was a welcome relief from the cold. The first control was located down an out and back in a small cemetery and we stopped after climbing back out for basically the first time in the race. This became common theme, stop, put on or take off clothing then climb or descend. This descent took us down into the town of St Marys where we stopped briefly for water. We were lucky to hit the end of the road and the start of a tricky track between two fences as the sun was going down. The riding was not overly steep however the track was overgrown in spots and this is when disaster hit.

Gypsies only ride on bikes with carbon derailleur and Tom managed to pick up a stick and shear off his top jockey wheel. The first fix didn't work but after some cross-threading and a solid cable tie, Chadbourne Engineering had completed a less than optimum job in about half an hour. The remainder of the leg was slow riding where one gear riding was ok followed by a long descent. The bike only really slowed the team down on the flatter section before TA at Fingal.

The TA at Fingal was in a hall which was the first solid building we had seen during the race. We spent some time having something hot to eat and packing since we now had to hike with paddle gear. We also had to wash our bikes so we tried out a few gear changes on Tom's bike and it seemed to work on about half the gears. The plan was to see how it went on the next leg and not seek other repair options.

Leg 7 - South Esk paddle, 11:30pm-8:30am Monday

The upper portion of the river was low so we were instructed to run out of town on the sealed road. At the police station where had to cut north over the railway line and then head west, staying between the railway and the South Esk. Sounded easy but we ended up too close to the river which did have a track but much better going was closer to the railway line. We caught this fairly early on and the team was moving well with paddles, PFDs and helmets swaying off the back of our packs. We were dressed to the hilt as we were due to be on the river for the rest of the night but the trekking portion had us cooking. We soon found CP15 with the boats and started on a leg which was more fun than any of us expected.

The river was low but there was some flow and the trick was to follow it no matter how good the other options looked. We were in and out of the boats dragging them with the tie downs we had brought along to attach to the front handle, a Georke Engineering suggestion. We took the wrong branch a couple of times which didn't cost us majorly. This leg provided some of the best wildlife spotting with platypus, swans and deer. Swans and deer don't normally get a mention but the swan attacked Liz and the deer were lined down a long section of river. Towards the end of the leg a side stream boosted the flow and we were in fun moving water complete with a few rapids. The sun had already come up and two of the team had a swim to freshen up less than half an hour before the TA at Avoca.

Leg 8- Avoca to Ben Lomond Trek, 8:30am-1:45am Tuesday

It was a relief to get the boats up the riverbank and settle into TA, which was again in a hall with hot water. We had a mandatory gear check which was easy as we had taken up about half the hall with gear so just pointed the referee in the general direction of each item. The big decision was if we should take the tent which weighed more than the bothy bag we were currently carrying as a shelter. Everyone was committed to get up and over Ben Lomond to the hut at the next TA without sleep so the tent stayed behind.

Dave thought of this leg as two legs in one which we all soon adopted. The first leg was to be tackled during the day, mostly in recognisable bush but with some serious wind. We trundled out of TA along the bitumen still scoffing down some hot food. Once the food was gone, Damon suggested a jog so we cruised along the road where we spotted Jan from Tri Adventure before heading bush and up to the first control. Dave had a calf issue before the race so said he was going to take it easy up this section which was still good enough to be on the front. Tom and Liz managed the back of the pack to make sure they both didn't get left behind while Damon roved. The first control's punch, CP17, had been blown off with the wind being in the 100km/h range. Dave managed to find it so we punched and moved on to the next two controls of this section.

The bush, although steep, was not overgrown and the team moved well to find the next two controls before heading up to the craggy peaks area. We saw Tim and Teagan for the last time at CP19 on the old railway track and whilst running on Rossarden rd we had our first visit from Craig and Louise. The chat was firstly around where the other teams were but they managed to stay strong and give nothing away. Soon enough we were all talking about the night the team had ahead. The wind was still strong, it wasn't hot that's for sure and we were about to walk across an alpine plateau after not being to sleep for about 36hrs. We were told that the wind was dying down and we were allowed to go up but it would be nice if we stopped and had a sleep.

We had completed the first half of leg 8 and the conditions were about to change drastically as we ascended to the Ben Lomond plateau. Someone had left a carton of coke at CP20 which we sampled and set off on the trail up to the plateau which had a large boulder field. This section was epic, the weather was raw and we were soon joined by Jarad who was supplying the boats for this race, the race referee and a race photographer. The three of them were running about twice as fast as us which was concerning. Talking with them was hard due to the concentration needed to ascend with the wind. We stopped at about 6:30pm just before the plateau and put on a serious amount of clothing. Care had to be taken not to lose anything as the wind would have blown it down about 600m of elevation. No one flinched, we didn't even say goodbye to the three visitors as we were on a mission to find anything that resembled a path.

The map had a cross country skiing path running across the plateau and all our efforts with the remaining hour and a half of daylight were spent trying to find a path or poles to direct us. We tried to keep our feet dry for about 10mins after which we were hopping in puddles between wet rocks and scrub, trying to avoid the deeper water. We made good time up to a small lake which we could see as soon as we got onto the plateau but no path had been found and it looked like we would be spending the rest of the night on a bearing.

We spent the next four hours doing the following: Dave would be up front taking a bearing then trying to remember which shrub which he was heading for, Damon was doing a similar task, Liz's headtorch died so she was on an emergency one and Tom was hoping that they wouldn't have to do this all

night. The fatigue and cold were starting to take their toll and the group stayed positive but everyone admitted later that they were not sure how the night would turn out. How fast are we going? Can we see any features? Are we going up? Where is all this water coming from? If we are going up maybe it will get dryer. Over three hours later the call came for us to go up to the high point to the left and this is when the wind really kicked in. We went about a couple of hundred meters and saw a pole marking the cross country ski path so our bearing was nearly dead on for the last few hours. We followed the poles to a junction where there was a sign to the village. Around midnight we hit the bitumen and were soon at CP21 in a refuge hut surrounded by a few ski huts, it was freezing.

Everyone was cold but moral was high, just 6km to the TA hut and it was on a path. We ran out of the village and straight past the turnoff we needed to take to the hut. It didn't matter, we were getting warm and Damon caught it after a couple of hundred meters. Once on the path the water returned and the cloud was whizzing past our ears. Luckily this path had poles galore and the task at hand became to stay awake and navigate the rocky wet path. The hut came just before 2am where we were welcomed by three volunteers who we were happy to see plus they had a fire going.

How long do we sleep? 2hrs or 3hrs. The decision was made diplomatically and everyone ate and put their heads down in the 3 room hut for 2.5 hours. The main room had a fire but the sleeping rooms were cold. Tom overdid the clothing and cooked but the other three managed a good sleep.

Leg 9 - Ben Lomond to Weldborough Ride, 1:45am-2:50pm Tuesday

It was not that easy to get out of bed, the wind was howling and our bikes were outside and not allowed in the hut. We also needed to dress for the apocalypse since the first part of the ride would be descending. Liz needed a rear light repair, Dave had done a spoke and Tom's bike hadn't done a gear change so nerves were still high. Once underway everything started to get better. The group could stay together without too much issue, we saw a Tasmanian devil and a spotted quoll which were both still alive, the wind was dying and it got warmer. We yelled at the sun to come up for a while and were soon rewarded with views of Ben Lomond. For the first real time in the race we talked about where we thought we were in relation to the other teams. Thoughts were that no one arrived at TA during the four hours we were there plus we thought no one would have crossed the plateau in the dark. The chat stopped there as anything could happen but the urgency started to go out of the group and everyone relaxed.

We stopped to remove clothing before the ascent to CP23 followed by a long flat section of bitumen before CP24 at Mathinna. Bike problems were starting to become a thing of the past as Tom had higher gears for climbing and could stop and manually put the bike into low gears for flat sections. It was during this section we spotted Jan again along with a photographer. Mathinna set the tone for the day with everyone becoming more social and no issue around stopping to look for pies. We failed as the pie shop doubled as the post office and they were out doing the rounds.

The section to St Columba Falls was straight forward with the tracks being mostly in good condition. Once at the hut by the falls we were on the tourist trail complete with old people, caravans, a cheese factory and a nice climb up to the blue tier single track. The final part of this leg was to be a highlight, the famous Blue Derby singletrack. It was good but after a couple of days racing no one was doing anything remotely good. Ricky took some video while we came down but it was mainly of us leaning into berms too early, getting caught in the wrong gear or mistiming basically everything. We made it down to the Weldborough pub to a group of poker faced volunteers who gave us nothing about where we were in relation to the other teams.

Another common theme of the race was being interviewed at TA. Liz got hit up after leg 7, no one tried after leg 8 but we were in the mood to talk at TA9. At the time we didn't realise these chats were going on the net but that is what was happening. The good mood was also based on the fact the pub had agreed to make burgers, chips and coffee. It was all time, we ate, we talked and everyone was pretty happy that we had daylight to play with for the start of the next trek.

Leg 10 - Myrtle Forest Trek, 2:50pm-11:40pm Tuesday

We made it about two kms before the food hit and we needed to stop for the toilet. The sun was out and it was good going on a decent road before we hit what was supposed to be a track marked with pink tape. Dave and Damon nailed the start of the tape and Dave was meticulous not only in following the tape but also the map. This paid off with the team spending about 10mins scouring a spur to find CP28 which turned out to be quite tricky for the other teams. After more pink tape we climbed up to what looked like mowed lawn for our second foot care stop. We had a look at our feet before the plateau on leg 8 but this stop was when we noticed how good our feet were after a night in freezing water.

The race was on to find the next section of pink tape before the sun went down and Dave managed to fall over just before the foot wash station. Physio Liz decided we could use the foot wash spray at CP 29 to clean the wound which was worked a treat. The second set of pink tape marking the mandatory path was close to CP29 but the start of the tape was tricky to find. The sun was almost gone but we managed to find some tape and we were on track for what was another testing four hours in the dark.

We were in myrtle forest which would be a good place to go on LSD. It doubles as a good place to go with little sleep as the floor covering is spongy and various shades of green and white. Add in four hours of pink tape and you are set for some "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas" experiences. The talk started around real things, past races, our own past and gossip. Liz then sung a song about a goat, she then sung it again with the backup vocals and then we decided to make up vocals about antelopes. We were all getting sleepy and it seemed that the person on the front finding tape was doing the best. We lost the tape a few times which developed into the scheme where one person goes ahead, one goes left, one goes right and one person stays with the last seen piece of tape. This then moved onto the game changer, pink tape champion.

The rules were if you are on the front you have to count each tape as you see it, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, yell it out and move as fast as possible. If you're next in line then you are trying to spot the next bit of tape before the person on the front which would promote you to the front. If you're behind then you were recovering after your turn. We were moving way too fast but no one cared, we stopped a couple of times to pant and laugh but everyone wanted the record so we were soon off. Damon won, how many he got we have no idea, people would yell out penalties for no reason; the rules were there were no rules.

Towards the end of the tape Dave and Damon decided we should come down the other side of the circuit track, bypassing the CP and going directly to the TA, then do an out and back to get the CP at the falls. The run down to the TA was mind bending as we were on a two plank boardwalk complete with bounce. They then added steps and we didn't run down, we floated on an imaginary carpet. Someone yelled out the volunteer at TA that we would be right back after we punched the CP and talk soon went to our sleep strategy. We hadn't talked about our second sleep but with the tent already set up at TA it was soon decided that 2hrs there was best.

At the time we didn't realise exactly what was going on but the TA was very quiet. The volunteer had his car with a small trailer, only our bike boxes were at the TA, they were asking if we were sleeping and how long the next leg would take. The reality was we were quite a bit ahead, we had our own transport allocated to us and the questions were around them de-manning the TA and making it to Musselroe Bay in time which was fair enough. The race was panning out well for us with both sections of pink tape plus the elusive CP28 being found in daylight plus another sleep at a quiet TA.

Leg 11 - Ralph Falls to Musselroe Bay Ride, 11:40pm-9:45am Wednesday

The shoe was on the other foot and Damon didn't have a great sleep while the others rested fine. Building the bikes in the dark before a long descent was now part of the routine and we were soon descending to Ringarooma and CP32. It was still dark and we must have been a bit tired as Tom thought he was looking for a French museum and the CP was on a fence at the museum. Ringarooma is modern but not that modern. We then came across the wood carvings at Branxholm where Damon asked if anyone else saw them, they were real.

We weren't as lucky as the previous morning where we started riding about an hour before sunrise, we would have to wait about four hours on the bike for some light. This meant we made it to Winnaleah and CP33 in the dark and all talk turned to if the servo at Gladstone would be open with hot pies. In the end we were in no real danger of missing the pies as it was after 8am when we hit Gladstone.

We took our time at Gladstone to eat pies, drink milk and take toll of where we were at. Everyone was still in good condition, we had nearly finished the second long ride and only a long trek and a couple of smaller legs were ahead of us. The rest of the ride was with some serious cross wind which turned to our tail for the last stretch before Musselroe Bay. Jan was taking over the Tim and Teagan so we weren't surprised to see her at the TA. We had a common TA setup with the box in the middle surrounded by our four bike boxes. After a couple of minutes the ground would be littered with clothing which had either just come off, was being put on or was spare for the next leg.

Leg 12 - Bay of Fires Trek, 9.45am-6:05pm Wednesday

There are four bays; big bays but still bite sized chunks. Dave is good at keeping everyone informed and also breaking down things so we have something to aim for. We destroyed the first bay which had CP36 about half way through. We were on the coast and also on a coastal vehicle track with

everyone feeling good. We even had a visit from Craig and Louise who still gave nothing away. We hit the sand of bay 2 and this is where things got hard. The wind was strong, the sand was soft and apart from Liz who was reaping the benefits of looking after herself the other three were starting to pay for the mental burden of being a white middle aged man and everything that goes with it.

Who needs paddle gloves when you can have blisters, who needs to cover your skin when you can burn and scratch it, who needs poles. Tom needs poles, use your poles Tom. Dave needs to eat, so eat Dave. Damon needs to stay awake so you better drop your pants and go for a run Damon. We found ways to get through what was a hard bay 2 and 3. The highlight was when Dave got hold of Damon's MP3 player with headphones and turned into the drunkest guy at the party. The duke box was on in his head and he was telling you about all the songs that were on it. This helped moral as you could sing a couple of bars with him before going back to the solitude of wind and following footsteps.

Eddystone point was the location of CP37 and the start of the Zoo or bay 4. Jarad joined us and broadcast quite a few facebook live videos. We kicked a ball around and generally got weird. It had a classic bay of fires rocky outcrop after which we took on our last section of sand for the race; we even got a jog on to try get on the water while the sun was still up. Just before the TA we had to do a boat shuffle to ferry everyone across the inlet. We got wet during the process and the rush was on to get dry and pack our gear into one box at TA.

Leg 13 - Ansons Bay Paddle, 6:05am-8:20pm Wednesday

Damon and Tom paddled together as did Dave and Liz for the entire race. Damon managed to not recognise Tom as we took off for the paddle due to the fact he had a buff on. No one remembered to adjust their foot pedals and soon enough we were paddling into an outgoing tide with over a 20knot tailwind. The sun was still up and we wanted to try finding both CP39 and the river mouth in the light. We managed to get half of this done and once we turned at the CP, the sidechop and weighed down double CTR skis did a good job of rounding up in the darkness. Tom and Dave tried to keep them straight and after a quick look at the shoreline we found the river mouth or hallucination creek. We were only on the river for a couple of kms but we saw a few interesting things which weren't really there. We pulled up to a boat ramp at the TA where the volunteer had lit a fire and all we had to do was change and go for a ride.

Leg 14 – Home Stretch Ride, 8:20pm-11:15pm Wednesday

Damon started proceedings by downing a litre of choc milk in one go. Something exploded in the fire and coals went everywhere. We were all shedding gear, repacking packs, loading the kayak bag and trying to build a bike for the final couple of hours. This transition was slow, sloppy and nothing like the other ten we had done. We did a verbal check to make sure we all had the mandatory gear we needed then we started on a basically a routechoicelless leg. This leg took the team close to three hours with other teams managing it in close to two hours. We shuffled our positions in the standard two, two formation we had stuck to the whole race, chatting and occasionally trying to sum up how we felt which was happy but the fatigue made words hard to come by and not sound sincere. Everyone was settled into the star wars start scene with the rain illuminating as it fell past our helmets and coasted with occasional pedals towards St Helens.

On the final descent into town, Liz nearly hit a wombat going flat out. None one else saw it and Damon asked if it was smoking a cigar, at least Liz was awake for the finishers lounge. We started to hear the music from the HQ as we leaned into the last couple of corners on bitumen. No one took on the bunny hop into the hall so we walked our bikes in through a solid crowd. We were mostly spent but words were coming out of our mouths while we ate in the finishers lounge. There are always areas to improve but our finish line celebration was dismal, no one put up one finger, no one yelled, no spews, no one had to go to hospital - all areas for improvement. After the pie hunt, death sleep, equipment clean, interview and goodbye to Damon; we spent the next few days cruising around St Helens watching teams finish. It's not often you can finish a race and watch so much finish line action but we weren't complaining. Our only issue was trying to dodge the question of if we were going to go to reunion island or not.

Shout-outs

1. Rootstock for coming all the way from the U S of A and all other overseas travellers
2. Geocentric and the volunteers
3. The general public of NE Tasmania – there are some freaks up here so we fit in quite well
4. Tri Adventure
5. Shotz
6. Race ref for hiding in a camo bivvy at selected CPS for hours and still giving no penalties

7. Seagate for not rocking up
8. Rob Preston for the Australian orienteering pants, 20 years well spent Rob
9. Lea Slosch for keeping the facebook up to date
10. Ian Dornom for just being Ian Dornom
11. Thunderbolt for the 5hour race food pack which Tom ate while on holiday after the race
12. Both Lea and Fleur for letting Damon and Sloschy out for the week
13. JK at peak adventure for the seat pads and chats