

# HardTales in the Wild

## Team HardTales in the Wild report on XPD 2006

The walls of the cave seemed to be closing in as Danny searched for an opening. He saw a glimmer of light and shouted "Chris! Greg! Is that you?" Then he leapt towards us in the dark. All hell broke loose in the cabin as Danny had leapt from his bunk across the room and collided into the other bunks. A nightmare ending to XPD! Not really. We had finished in eight and a half days and a lot had happened in that time.

### **Leg 1. Mountain Bike - 52k - Undulating ride through rural areas**

After running/walking down the Nut at Stanley it was a good ride with plenty of teams around us to keep us pushing through the next leg. We kept together without anyone needing a tow. We arrived at Arthur River in around 32nd place with many teams around us. This was a quick transition into our dry kayak gear, this was the last time we would see dry gear again.

### **Leg 2. Kayak - 27k - Remote flowing Arthur River (Grade 2)**

The water level was down a little with many of the rapids being shallow and requiring walking/dragging the kayaks through. We had plenty of company on this leg as positions changed depending on who got stuck in the rapids. It was still good fun and the competition was still keen. Another quick transition onto the bikes.

### **Leg 3. Mountain Bike - 26k - I only remember the last 10k on gravel into the wind**

This was a slow leg for us as I think we were tiring a bit and we were going slowly into a head wind. It seemed to take forever to get to the next TA which could be seen from around 5k along the road. Still riding together with no problems, we arrived at the next TA with around two hours till dark.

### **Leg 4. Trek - 73k - Remote coastal walk, fairly close to South America**

We had a hot meal after packing the bikes away and loading up with heaps of food and water. We thought this leg would take us around 28 hours. We did the first 14k to the beach in good time with a few teams behind us in the distance and a few ahead. We decided to have around 3hrs sleep near CP7 as it had been a long day with little sleep since leaving Hobart. We picked a bad spot to sleep as all the teams walked past us talking and shining their lights on us. We

were up before dawn and onto the beach leg. We passed a few teams that had slept further up the track. It was tough going in the beach as our shoes filled with sand and we continually stopped to clean them. I kept up the 3B cream on this leg as I did not want any blisters. We caught up to a few teams near the manned CP mainly due to Gina putting her head down and setting a fast pace along the beach. We were able to top up our water from the house tank instead of using the brown stream water. We did the long beach trek in bare feet which was great on the hard packed sand then it was back to the sand dunes.

The vehicle track through the sand dunes wandered all over the place and this was the hardest section on the walk. We arrived at the Pieman River with around one hour to nightfall. Unfortunately there were four teams waiting at the river for the short kayak trip to the TA. It was well after dark when we finally reached the TA.

### **Leg 5. Kayak - 18k - Pristine river paddle against run out tide and freezing**

We took around two hours to get out of this TA. We had put both kayaks in the water when we found that one had partly deflated. We had to replace this kayak which again took some time. It was now late evening. We had only paddled for around 30 min when Chris called for the pump as his kayak started to deflate. We had to stop every 30 min on this leg to inflate one side of the kayak. Needless to say this leg seemed to take forever and we did not get into the next TA until 2am. By now we were very cold and as soon as we stopped paddling and got out of the kayaks we froze. It was an issue carrying the kayaks up the hill cold, wet and miserable. We decided to break out the sleeping bags and mats and have a good sleep. We slept soundly till around 6 am but it still took us another two hours to unpack and assemble the bikes ready for the next leg. It looked like we were starting to use up a fair amount of time in the transition areas. At this TA Gina was informed that her mum was taken to hospital but all was well.

### **Leg 6. Mountain Bike - 154k - Huge ride, let the pain begin**

We saw our first of many snakes on this leg, we were on our own most of the way and this was the start of the big hill climbs. It was a real buzz on the downhill to CP 11, then came the two hour climb out in the mud. The track had been chopped up by now but at least it was a good constant grade for the climb. We got to the phone box at around 6pm and we were lucky to get an egg and bacon roll from the shop before they closed. We met several teams here as they all decided to have a rest and some food. The ride along the old railway track was OK. We met another team at CP13 as we all got wet in the river crossing. We kept going

for a few hours but decided to sleep again for a few hours. Our aim was to have from 3 to 4 hours sleep per day but it was not working out that way. I got cold during our sleep and once again we tried to sleep near the track but were woken by teams passing by. Being cold and having teams pass while we were asleep became too much for me. I got up and kept warm by walking up and down the road for an hour and a half.

We were up again around 3am, by now I was starting to nod off on the bike, partly because we were going so slowly and partly because I did not sleep earlier. The team stopped for me so I could have 30 min sleep around 7am. We were just getting up to go when a logging truck pulled up and a big bloke got out to talk to us. "How come you are still on the road? They closed the road yesterday for 24 hours! You guys must be really slow!" What an insult to wake up to.

Back on the bikes to the Leven Canyon lookout, we went down the wrong track before someone said "Don't you usually walk up hill to lookouts?" We were joined by another team that rode with us a fair way to the mid station. The hike a bike section was the longest I have ever done. I wonder if anyone tried riding out after the climb? The hill climbs to Gowrie Park were never ending. We were forced off the road by one idiot and when I tried to return to the road I caught the edge and came down, nothing serious especially in granny gear. We arrived at mid station with many teams still in camp and a few more to come in. We only had around one hours sleep but for a number of reasons we still left over an hour past our due time. Gina had managed to contact home to check on her Mum, all was well.

### **Leg 7. Trek - 23k - Mt Roland ( Holed up in the cave)**

We got to the base of the mountain track just on dark. The wind had picked up considerably and it started to get cold. Gina was not feeling well and our pace slowed dramatically, we made it to the shelter of a cave which was close to CP 17 the trig point. We all decided that it was best to stay in the shelter of the cave as it would not be safe walking the exposed ridges with Gina taking ill. We found a flat section for Gina to rest in and covered her with the sleeping bag and space blanket. Danny, Chris and I tried to sleep in another cold and wet area of the cave but it was difficult as we were all shivering. The cave was also the access point to the top of the mountain so once again we were kept awake by teams coming through. It was too cold for us to sleep so we got Gina up, who by now was feeling a little better, then off to the Trig point. We met two other teams searching for the CP which was obscured by a rock

then doubled back to the trail which took us along the mountain. We walked for around three hours before sunrise and kept pace with another team for most of that time. It was a great walk during daylight and we took the time to take in the views.

As we were coming off the mountain I was lagging behind and as I came around a bend I saw Gina, her cap anyway, squatting behind some bushes answering the call of nature. I apologized to her then walked around the bend and waited. A minute or two had gone by, so I called out to Gina, but no answer. I walked around the bend saw her cap behind the bushes but then looked further down the track and there was the rest of the team including Gina waiting for me. Gina turned out to be a yellow tree, my first sleepmonster!

We enjoyed the walk and the views and there were still a few teams in sight. Down the hill to the bike TA

### **Leg 8. Mountain Bike - 51k - The rugged mountains (saddle agony)**

We arrived at the TA just as two teams were getting ready to go. Chris called out, "Where's the map for this leg"? I did not have it, apparently Chris had put it in the bike box which was not at this TA. Chris quickly obtained a mud map from Buzz Powell of Goldfish, Buzz did not give us much of a chance of making this leg OK. We had a hot meal and left nearly an hour after the other teams. Our strategy was to follow the bike tracks at each intersection and hope that we made the right choice. The roads were the roughest to date and it was taking a toll on my undercarriage. We actually found CP 20 easily and were surprised to find that the two teams ahead of us had not logged onto the CP white board. Chris let out a big Yahoo, not bad with no map. We got to the intersection/bitumen road but we could not tell from the mud map weather it was right or left onto the bitumen, we went left. After around 5k we stopped and saw a Europcar van coming behind us. Chris stopped them and asked which way to the TA? They said that they could not tell us as it would be outside assistance. The smiles on their face sort of indicated that we had to turn around, which we did. Another bumpy ride to the TA with every peddle stroke agony. I got off and walked a few times to relieve the pain. We got to the TA behind Goldfish but the other team came in around half an hour after us. They said that they had taken a wrong turn and had a huge uphill ride to get back on course. Pack up the bikes, warm ourselves by the fire for a while, then it was off onto the overland track just on dark.

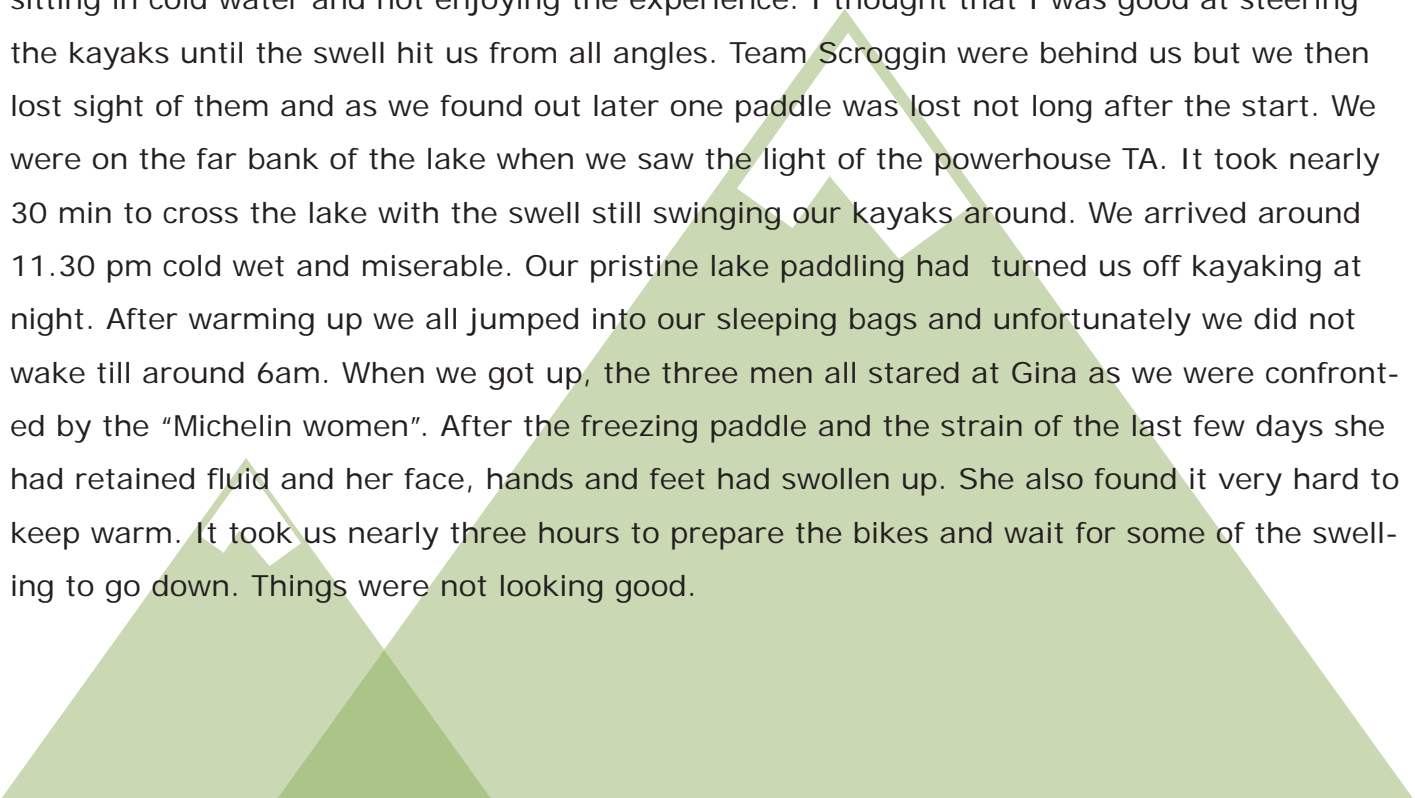
### **Leg 9. Trek - 44k - The famous overland track and Mt Ossa**

We managed to stay on the track as it continually wound its way between the mountains. By the time we came to the open area around Lees hut we were again a little tired and in

the open grassy area we lost the trail and became a little disoriented. It took us over 30 min to get back to the forest track then keep onto the trail which took us to the hut. We arrived there around midnight with two teams already camped inside. Gina and Chris got into the bunks while Danny and I slept on the verandah. Another team had arrived after us but we did not hear them. By 3.00am we were all freezing and most of the teams got up to go again. The Tassie boys from Irenic waited for us as they were going to show us the track which could be hard to find. Once on the track, Irenic soon moved ahead of us. I am sure that at times we were walking in our sleep as we twisted and turned along the track. We made it to Pelion Hut not long after sunrise and decided to get another hour's sleep in the warmer hut. This worked a treat as we all felt a little better. We arrived at the base of Mt Ossa and started the long climb up the mountain, we passed a few teams that were on their way back down the mountain to pick up the overland track again. We set a good pace for the rest of the walk down to Narcissus. On the way we ran into Scroggin that had one member ill and the SAR team also met up with them at the same time. We made it to the Kayak TA just on dark. It was another kayak leg in the dark and the wind was picking up. We had a reasonably quick turn around as we did not want to spend too long on the water at night.

### **Leg 10. Kayak - 14k - The glorious Lake St Clair**

Things started well and we thought that the following wind would help us. As we got further down the lake the swell was coming from all angles and at times the waves were breaking over the back of the kayak. We found it difficult to steer the kayaks and by now we were all sitting in cold water and not enjoying the experience. I thought that I was good at steering the kayaks until the swell hit us from all angles. Team Scroggin were behind us but we then lost sight of them and as we found out later one paddle was lost not long after the start. We were on the far bank of the lake when we saw the light of the powerhouse TA. It took nearly 30 min to cross the lake with the swell still swinging our kayaks around. We arrived around 11.30 pm cold wet and miserable. Our pristine lake paddling had turned us off kayaking at night. After warming up we all jumped into our sleeping bags and unfortunately we did not wake till around 6am. When we got up, the three men all stared at Gina as we were confronted by the "Michelin women". After the freezing paddle and the strain of the last few days she had retained fluid and her face, hands and feet had swollen up. She also found it very hard to keep warm. It took us nearly three hours to prepare the bikes and wait for some of the swelling to go down. Things were not looking good.



## **Leg 11. Mountain Bike - 87k - At least there were some good down hills on this leg**

We again started very slowly on this leg as Gina was still not well. We were on a downhill section of gravel road when Gina veered off the road in front of me and hit the ground like a sack of potatoes. She did not move for a while, we all raced to see how she was, she lay there for a while then smiled at us and said that she was OK. She had a large stone imbedded in her helmet and a healthy hole in her arm. We managed to patch her up and we got going again. The fall must have triggered something as she came good for the rest of the leg and we kept up a good pace to the Kayak TA. We did not see any other teams on this leg. We actually enjoyed this ride because we had caught up on our sleep and we were not continually grinding uphill.

We spent around an hour packing up the bikes and inflating kayaks for the Derwent River leg. We left on the first part of the paddle with around two hours till dark.

## **Leg 12. Kayak - 62k - Along the Derwent ( Grade 2 )**

The paddle on the dam was great, no wind and very mild. We went past the ski club as we were following the lights of another team on their portage around the dam. We pulled in at the ski club and decided to have a hot meal which went down well. We were not in a hurry as we knew that we had plenty of time to do the portage and have a sleep.

Our strategy was to deflate one kayak which Chris had on his shoulders and to carry the other kayak with all the gear. This only worked for a few minutes as the weight was too much for the smaller members of the team and the kayak on Chris's back was taking its toll. We then took one kayak down at a time which meant that we walked 9k for the portage. We found a good spot on the side of the hill near the spillway and decided to set up camp. We had a good nights sleep and planned to get up around 5 am to finish the portage and inflate the other kayak. We were woken by the sound of a siren and gushing water as the water was released from the dam. We all laid in bed a little longer and by the time we got our act together it was 8.30am and we had wasted more time. We did not know it at the time, but we had caught up to several teams that were held up by the dark zone, a missed opportunity to keep up with the other teams. By now our aim was just to finish and keep the team intact for the remainder of the race.

We set a leisurely pace down the river and only started to refocus when we saw the rapids coming up. The first few were good fun. Then we came up to a long rapid near the trees on

the right of the river. Chris and Gina went first with Danny and I close behind. We got a little close to the trees and became wedged in the overhanging branches. We were slowly dragging ourselves along the trees when Danny had to let go of one large limb that was twisting him backwards. I did not have time to duck and the branch hit me in the chest and sent me backwards out of the kayak into the rapids. I saw the kayak tipping over but luckily the branches stopped it from going all the way. I managed to grab the side of the kayak and my paddle as it went by and got to the rear of the kayak. We were all moving along at a good pace in the rapids by now with me hanging on behind. Once out of the rough water I quickly got into the kayak feeling quite refreshed, my first wash in a few days. Danny, Chris and Gina were having a good laugh at my expense.

Our leisurely pace saw us falling asleep on a few occasions. I had a chuckle to myself as Gina was sound asleep in the front of one kayak with Danny doing the same in our kayak. On one occasion we both nodded off and only woke to the sound of boiling water. We were going backwards down the river and about 100m from a rapid, we sobered up after that. The white water sections on the lower part of the river were great and we managed to get through these without problem. We arrived at the last TA mid afternoon but by now Chris was dehydrated as he had run out of water a few hours earlier. We had another long rest at this TA which again was frustrating, but the team was not firing on all cylinders at this time.

### **Leg 13. Trek/Abseil - 39k - Across the back of Mount Wellington**

We set off with around 2hrs before dark from New Norfolk for the long climb up the mountain range then onto Mt Wellington. As darkness fell we stopped again, for a bite to eat and a power nap, then kept plodding uphill to CP 31 which we found without too much difficulty. We again decided to have a sleep for a few hours and we set the watch alarm for 3.00am to get up and going again. We were up to our old tricks again and missed the alarm, we finally got going again just before sunrise. During the night another team passed us as we were asleep and kept us awake with torches etc, nothing had changed.

The walk along the mountain range was rocky and tough going on the feet but some of the views back to New Norfolk and onto Hobart were great. We got to CP32 and the abseil just behind the team that had passed us early in the morning and had a 30 min wait while they completed the abseil first. We all enjoyed the 100m abseil off Mount Wellington and the bush bashing off the mountain was OK thanks to all the teams before us flattening the scrub. We quickly picked up the walking trail back down the mountain then through the suburbs for the final Kayak leg to the finish.

### **Leg 14. Kayak - 3k - Took the strain of the feet anyway.**

We had passed the other team coming off the mountain and we jumped into the kayaks for the final 3k to the finish line. The wind had once again picked up and we headed into a 15 knot head wind and a good swell towards the finish. The good thing about the Sevylors is that they track well into the wind and handle the swell easily. We were greeted at the finish by a few race officials and teams that had finished, then we sat down for our final celebration of champagne and pizza. It was a great way to finish the race.

We were all smiles and happy to finish with some time to spare and the team healthy and in good spirits.

True to form we slept well that night and spent the time before the presentation dinner cleaning and packing for our trip back to Devenport, to catch the ferry home. Our trip home ended with some small mishaps, Danny's bike came loose from the bike rack and shredded a tyre as it bounced along the road. Gina's bike completely dismounted the carry rack at 100k and looks decidedly worse for wear. Never a dull moment in our team.

Looking back we had a once in a lifetime experience competing in XPD in the wilds of Tasmania. Congratulations to all the teams on making the distance. There are some incredible athletes in adventure racing and many of them were in XPD. The organizing team and volunteers did an awesome job and apart from finding every hill in Tasmania there was nothing to complain about.

***Pa Egg***

***Team HardTales in the Wild***

***XPD 2006***

