

HardTales in the Wild

Max 24 Hour - September 2004

Kangaroo Valley is without a doubt a beautiful place, attracting tens of thousands of tourists each year. So we wandered down to see what the fuss was about. Entering the picturesque Bendeela Camping grounds, we were greeted by dozens of wombats, wallabies and other native Australian fauna. Also on this list of strange and exotic creatures were about 80 Adventure Racers, gathered for the Kathmandu Maximum Adventure inaugural 24 hour adventure race and the Max Adventure Sprint.

The sun scorched down as we set up tents on Friday afternoon, only to dip behind the intimidating hills to the west all too soon and invite the cool of darkness. By 2am it had reached 4 degrees and I awoke for a tinkle and a chance to ponder the following days choice of attire. With 24 hours to complete the course, chances were that I would feel the very same cold without the comfort of my -10 sleeping bag.

With the new sun above us and a fresh cuppa in hand, Andrew and I waited for Freya and Paul to arrive as we mulled over gear and planned our attack. Pa Egg hovered impatiently, asking questions as he prepared for his first ever Adventure Race. He was competing in the Sprint with a complete stranger, Danny Ma, and we had coined the team name Ma and Pa to break the ice. He flicked his brakes, checked his pack, adjusted his cap, scratched his and moved from person to person in nervous anticipation.

Race director Gary Farebrother had promised 'a few surprises' for his first 24 Hour and when we picked up the maps an hour before the start, he wasn't kidding. In the event notes sent out a week earlier, he had mentioned 55km of riding, 25km of running and around 10km of paddling. He got most of it right, but the map wheel read 95km as we hurriedly marked the checkpoints and plotted a course for the bike stages. A brief look around saved you trying to savvy up on the contour lines of the map and we knew those 95km would be filled with hills. A long day was planned indeed! As for the 10km of paddling, it was more like 13km and all in a sevyolor k79, which meant 6.1kmh terminal velocity.

The excitement set in when we noticed a Transition to zip line and another Transition to abseil. About bloody time. We had started to feel that racing in Aus was becoming like triathlon, with ridiculous distances at break neck speed and little wow factor. The Maximum Adventure Crew had listened to our pleas and had stepped up to the plate.

The sprint race folk set off two hours before us at 10am (Pa Egg has the skinny on what happened next) and we got some quiet time for final kit checks and course planning.

Stage One was simple enough, a mongrel of a climb out of the valley on the mountain bikes and a 17km ridge top ride to a you-beaut downhill before transitioning to the boats. We started fast with me offering a towline to Frey. It went well for about 100m before she hit a pot

hole and my static line ripped her off the bike! My bad! I knew I should have put the bungy cord into the tow! Frey lost a heap of bark from her left hand side and I knew the pain would set in after the adrenaline wore off. It took some work to make up the lost time but somehow we reached TA 1 in around 5th spot.

The boats went a little more smoothly as we zig zagged the river collecting checkpoints along the way. It was a freight train of teams all at warp speed and it didn't seem to matter if you had Mako wing blade paddles or dodgy plastic spoons. We made good time however and transitioned in 3rd with two teams hot on our heels. Next on the agenda was crossing about 200m of water with our bikes on the boats before a 30km ride to the zip line. A k79 however is hardly designed to carry 2 bikes and 2 people and crossing the river without losing a bike or team-mate proved quite interesting. Fortunately Mark Watson was on hand to capture the madness with his trusty camera.

The next ride was a slog of rolling hills, collecting CPs along the way. Not much time to be made or lost here as it was pretty basic fire roads after an initial climb that would prove fun on the return leg. The zip line was great and made the ride worth while. I couldn't wait for my team-mates and slipped into the harness before zinging along the 120m cable, skimming the water near the end and touching down like a butterfly. Well done to Chris Milne from the Edge for setting a perfect zip line! Frey wasn't so lucky as her petite frame and 1.5L Camelbak Classic were not enough to offer the momentum needed to clear the line before Paul crashed into her at about 20kmh. They both cleared the line with a bit of work though and we were off to cover as much of the foot stage as possible before nightfall.

The foot nav, true to Max Adventure form, involved monster high pints and some serious thinking for a successful journey. We reached the highest peak on sunset and took a moment to reflect on the beauty of it all and spare a thought for Nige and the AROC/Montrail crews in America, before setting off to finish the stage. A couple of errors (again, my bad) saw us slip off the pace by around 40 minutes and lose a couple of places to boot. But the finale for the trek was an abseil into the chilly waters before swimming a couple of hundred metres to transition onto the bikes. Adventure Racing is about the adventure and we were having a ball. Riding home we thought we had it nailed, making great time until one of the boys hit the wall. Too much concentration and not enough eating was the cause and the remedy was a pack of Twisties and a squirt of Hammer gel. Getting our bikes back across the final river however brought a new surprise as our boats had been replaced by half a dozen truck tyre inner tubes, strung together with rope and sitting in the middle of the river! The deal was to reel the tubes in, pack the bikes and bodies on top and splash our way across the river. We arrived there at a little before midnight and it was getting cold. My thoughts immediately turned to the people following a couple of hours behind and I hoped they packed some extra dry poly pros for the ride home!

The final ride back offered a couple of tricky CPs which threw the lead group into disarray before the finish. We rolled across the line at 1:45am in 3rd place only to discover that we had missed CP15 (we neglected to mark it on the map!!!) and would be given a one hour penalty, relegating us to 4th. It hadn't been a perfect race, but we had worked well together and new recruits Freya and Andrew proved to be popular additions. We're looking forward to the Southern Traverse together. Thanks again to our support crew and sponsors for getting us through another tough race and thanks to the Maximum Adventure crew for putting the Adventure back into Adventure Racing.

Angry Man

