

HardTales in the Wild

Team 3 Generations - December 2005

When you talk to people who don't know about Adventure Racing, the first question invariably asked is "Why would you want to do that?"

It's so simple – "The people you mix with when you are at an Adventure Race, whether you are a volunteer or a competitor, love life and are getting the most from life."

This weekend I competed in only my second Adventure Race, but it was so special because I competed in a team with my elder son and my grandson, neither of whom have competed before.

We raced in Canberra in quite unpleasant weather as it was cold and windy, despite being early December and it was a night event, commencing at 6pm with a cut off time (finish time) of 11.30pm. We finished at 11pm, several hours past Douglas's bedtime. How did he pull up? It was hard work but he made it all the way and he was very proud of himself. He almost fell asleep on the last kayak leg as we paddled into the wind. And his dad hoisted him onto his shoulders as we did the final rogaine through Kings Park, after we took his soaking wet shoes and socks off so we could warm his feet up. But as we came close to the finish chute he said, "Put me down Dad, I've got to run across the finish line by myself."

Douglas is only seven years old. He is the youngest competitor at an AROC Race to date. I have helped out as a volunteer at several AROC and Maximum Adventure Races over the past eighteen months, as my younger son has raced, and then my husband was bitten by the bug and started to race as well. I've also been support crew for the two of them at various races including this years World Championships in New Zealand. Obviously I've been bitten by the same bug.

Douglas has heard us all talk so much about different events and he often asked "Grandma, when can I do an Adventure Race." The standard answer was "You have to be a good mountain bike rider, you have to be able to walk a long way through the bush and you have to be a good kayaker. And the youngest person to race has been ten, so probably when you are ten".

I think he had other plans from the start as he and his dad started riding single dirt tracks around the local area as well as some bushwalking. He's pretty determined and pretty gritty for a then six year old. He'd also had some light switched on when he saw the advertisement

on TV about ""there's sports and then there's extreme sports"". He commented that he did snowboarding and he raced motorbikes and one day he would be an adventure racer like his Uncle Matt.

A couple of months ago as I worked as a volunteer at Manly Dam for AROC (Tom and Alina) I asked Alina if I could enter Douglas in a race with me. It was a big ask, but Alina simply asked if I thought he could do it. He was in.

I have to say a very big thank you to both Tom and Alina for allowing this to happen and for having the trust in us to pull it off. I also want to thank all the other competitors who offered nothing but support and constantly cheered us on with comments such as keep going little man, you're doing well. And the volunteers at check points who offered support and encouragement and asked why we didn't have him on a tow line on the bikes.

The race started with a run from the start line around the shore of Lake Burley Griffin to the Kayak put in. We started to jog, but a combination of Grandma's inability to breathe when she runs and Doug jogging to keep up with our walking pace soon settled us to a steady walk. We weren't the last team to put into the water, there was another team behind us. Doug started in the middle but the constant clashing of paddles with his dad soon dictated that we put him in the front with Grandma in the middle calling the stroke, left, right, left, right. It worked fairly well and when he was tired he put his small paddle across his lap and rested. The swell was so big at this point that when he did paddle he had trouble getting the paddle to even connect with the water at times. When we climbed off the kayak at the other end his eyes were alive and he commented that he didn't know that he was going to be a good canoer. Could we do some more?

A quick run up to the pushbikes to Transition 2 and off on the next leg. I had intended to navigate but it was obvious we wouldn't need to use a compass for this race around Canberra and so I asked Adam if he'd like to have the maps? His comment was a typical male reply "the more I'm in control of the better I'll feel". We collected the first checkpoint with a few other teams and still a team behind us, but then it turned to custard. We had to collect 12 checkpoints before the next transition, but after collecting checkpoint 3 Adam took us straight to Transition 3. He'd forgotten to navigate to the other checkpoints. We'd done a few extra kilometers in the wrong direction, but unphased, we about faced and set off to complete the task properly. It was during the cycling that we realized that Doug's little mountain bike is a lot heavier than adult racing bikes and he only has six gears where we have at least twenty-four. He stayed mostly on footpaths or cyclepaths where they were available, simply as a

matter of safety. When we hit the dirt tracks he was 'rapt and took off. We'd actually decided prior to the race start that dependent on time we might drop checkpoints 9 and 10 as a time saver and so we followed through on this to try to pick up some lost time. It worked as we arrived at Transition 3 (for the second time) just behind several other teams, but now in last place. It didn't matter we were having fun.

We now had our first little rogaine with a twist. As we got to each checkpoint there was a map showing the location of the next checkpoint. You miss one and you've got a problem. We did it easily. Adam now had the hang of reading the maps easily and Doug enjoyed clipping the control card at some of the checkpoints. Back to Transition 4 to collect our bikes and a direct ride (no checkpoints to collect) to the kayaks at Transition 5. Douglas was getting excited at the thought of getting back onto the water. We were praying that the wind had dropped as we would be paddling straight across the swell. As we got back we saw the water was calm. Great! Up at the bike drop some goose had taken our life jackets with our glowsticks on them. Alina to the rescue again, as this was also the main start finish area, with another set of PFDs to fit us. A quick pulling off of our long pants to leave just bike nicks on as Adam still hadn't forgiven me for saying we didn't have time to get changed for the first paddle and we were still wet, then down to the kayaks and into the water again.

"Oh shit no!" came from the back of the kayak as we hit about the halfway mark kayaking toward the lights in front of Old Parliament House where our next Transition was. It was pitch black now out on the water. Adam had just realized that our Sport identi dipper was in the pocket of his long pants. He got me to get the phone out of my backpack while he and Doug kept paddling and then Doug and I kept paddling while Adam phoned Katrina (his wife) to drive around to Transition 6 with the missing bit. She was ahead of us, but she wasn't driving, she was running. We let the people on the control know and they said it was not a problem, and gave us a new set of maps to do the next rogaine around the National Buildings. We left our life jackets on for this and with headlights on we walked in our wet clothes around the south side of Canberra. Once again Adam's navigating was spot on. I knew at this point that another one of us had been bitten by the bug. Doug was starting to tire. It was already more than an hour past his bedtime. His dad picked him up halfway around here and put him on his shoulders to give the little guy's legs a rest. As we came back to the Lake's edge with all checkpoints collected we saw a woman jogging toward us. It was Katrina and she had the identi dipper with her. She handed it to us and set off back on foot to the other side of the lake to where the car was with her daughter, who was asleep and my mother who was looking after her. Yeah! It's obviously a family thing. After Katrina's run I'm thinking it won't be long before she's bitten by the bug too.

Back to collect the kayaks for the final paddle.

We stayed in close to the shore as the wind had picked up again and we had to paddle directly into the wind. Doug was in the front again but he was having trouble staying awake so we kept talking to him, but didn't get too many responses. Thanks at this point to the safety boat who followed us all the way to the other side where we pulled the boat out of the water for the last time. Douglas paddled the last 50 metres, but it was hard. As we took our life jackets off we realized Doug was cold and he was also getting hungry. We hadn't eaten yet. We grabbed some food out of our backpacks, took Doug's wet shoes and socks off and his new cycling gloves (he'd actually slept with these the night before when Pop gave them to him for the race) and he was back up on his Dad's shoulders.

For the last rogaine in King's Park we could go to checkpoints in any order as long as we collected 70 points. Doug was already brightening up but then his day was made. He spotted a possum low on the trunk of a tree. His eyes were wide open again and he spotted another one again later. It was almost 11pm and we had two more checkpoints planned to give us the correct points when we saw Greg coming along the path toward us. He kept us company for the last few hundred metres, but as we saw the finish line Douglas was down and we jogged in to the cheer and applause of so many other teams. Team "Three Generations" had made it.

It felt good. We were a little cold but we weren't sore and we were way too excited to be tired now.

We were given the chance to collect a prize and Douglas collected his own head torch. Yeah it suffered the same fate as the bike gloves the night before. He wore it to bed shining it on the ceiling of the motel room until his father told him to turn it off before he wore the batteries out.

Why do we do it?

Nothing else gives you the same buzz and the people out there are great!

Ma Egg

