

We first saw something about the Rogue 24 a couple of years ago and it immediately piqued our interest. So when Liam kindly offered us a place for this year's race (he was saving some for "elite" or overseas teams – we were definitely only the latter) we jumped at the chance. With fellow Kiwis Cath and Nick also granted an entry, it wasn't long before the alarm went at the unpleasantly early hour of 3.55am (1.55am Aussie time...) and we were off to the airport. The nice quarantine officers in Brisbane didn't even blink when we declared our 48 muesli bars, gels and lollies and before long we arrived at Lake Perseverance. Bikes assembled, gear sorted and even time for a short nanna-nap before 4pm when others started arriving.

Dinner was delicious – even "Rob-I-hate-curry" went back for seconds - and after watching a video of some poor souls dragging themselves through freezing mud and Patagonian crud, we were early to bed.

After an equally delicious breakfast the fun began with the map handout. Trekking was always going to be our weak point so we were conservative in our plan for the first leg, especially as we had no idea of what that gorge would be like. After 10 minutes we knew CP 5 was an unlikely option given how slow the terrain was. We followed the crowd to 1 and 2, then sneaked across the contour from 2 to cut the corner and gained about 10 places in the process. To our delight we popped out just ahead of Cath and Nick, who were travelling quite a bit quicker. They weren't so delighted, especially as we caught them another couple of minutes not long after by way of a lucky route choice through the boulders. They shot off to 5 while we carried on to 4 and then 6, 7 and 10. We then contoured round to 11 (from approx 15) before climbing up to 12 and then dropping down to the TA, taking about 4 hours for the leg.

Our transition was pretty pathetic actually, taking about 25 mins to get on the water. We were expecting the boats to be very slow so didn't plan on getting all the checkpoints. We started with CP19, where we did a quick seating swap so heavier Rob was in the back, then anticlockwise through 18, 17 (yummy dead roo...) and 16. Our portage across the little peninsula was painfully slow as Rob's hamstring threatened to snap, then off to 14 and 15. By this time we had decided to get all the kayak CPs as we were travelling a lot quicker than we thought we would, so a long paddle round to 20. It was nearly dark by this stage so we fished out the lights and carried on round to 22. It got properly dark on the way to 21 and we were thankful that we had been able to get a reasonable look across the lake on our way to 22 as it became a whole new ball game without daylight. A final push to the TA, where we were happy to get out of the boat and into dry clothes after about 3hrs on the water.

Another slow transition and we were off to 23, then along a really nice animal track that spat us out almost at the road and just in the right place to drop down to 25. The terrain was nicer and faster than we were expecting so we decided to go for 27 and 30 then back to 24. Unfortunately Rob sprained his ankle rather badly so the last 1.5km was painfully slow. We got to transition about 30 minutes later than we would have liked and prepared for a long night on the bike. Rolling off up the road and my left pedal felt strange; two seconds later and the whole thing parted company from the crank! It's possible I may have said a rude word at this point. The bearing had seized and now I knew what that strange little squeak was when I rode the bike around the carpark the day before. The only saving grace was that it happened in the TA and not somewhere near CP 43! In disbelief we went back and tentatively inquired of the officials if anyone might have a spare pedal. "Yep, such and such will have one". A miracle! I didn't even catch his name but boy, were we thankful and hereby formally thank you for saving our race! It was a flat pedal so while our knight installed the pedal, I rummaged around in the gear bin to relocate my left running shoe and off we went again.

We had intended to get CP 31 but took a wrong track off the bitumen (the one leading back towards CP 23). We soon realised, back to the road and in the next track. It had a great big locked gate/fence across it and no sign of anyone having crawled under it. We were starting to lose confidence a bit; we had lost so much time already with the ankle and the pedal so we quickly decided to forget 31 and carried on up the road. I was starting to feel decidedly soggy by this stage and after being passed by "Husband towing Wife" like we were standing still, we stopped for a little breather at the top. I was starting to have trouble getting any food down. Those muesli bars had lost their appeal, my sandwiches felt like cardboard and we seemed to have left the lollies back at transition. Cath and Nick reappeared having spent time looking for CP 31 without finding it – I silently breathed a sigh of relief that we hadn't gone for it. Out and back to 32 and then a nice bitumen ride via 33 to 34. We caught and passed Richard and Tamsin somewhere here, then got 35 and off to 37. Walking along the path towards 37 and we meet Cath and Nick coming the other way declaring that the control is not on the track. Well no, it's not supposed be, it's in a gully. They had lost their descriptions and were giving up on the 100 pointer. I could actually see the CP from where we standing, much to our amusement. We carried on, together now, to CP38, 41, 40 and 43, enjoying the great descents albeit with a giggling thought that what goes down must go up. Half way down the hill to 42 and Cath's battery dies – luckily we stopped too, as her replacement battery was also dead and so good turn no. 2 was done. I was still feeling under-par so wasn't unhappy when we decided to leave 39 and started the long climb up to 46 and beyond. Cath and Nick returned the favours by supplying me with some food that appealed and eventually we got to the top of the hill. We had been looking forward to the flatter riding and more of a navigational challenge and whizzed around through 50, 48, 47 (slight time loss here with an unmarked track or two) and 49. Passed Richard and Tamsin again on the way up to 51 and then headed off to 52. We missed the track going off the road into 52 so carried on around the bitumen road to approach it from the south. Off to 53 and then I started to wonder if the sleep monsters were getting to me as we saw a random little fire burning all by itself. It looked like a camp fire but there was no camp. We carried on through some smoke to 54 just as it was starting to get light. Heading down the narrow forest track straight into the sunrise was surreal, especially as I was still wondering if it was a fire. A fantastic end to the ride through 55 and 56 and downhill into the TA at about 6.30am.

The paddle boards were available so off we went. We had had a lesson a few days earlier so had no trouble although we were worried we had punched more than 30 seconds apart at CP 63 due to our sub-optimal turning and backing skills. Without thinking too deeply about it, we set off on the kayak. Assembled the antiquated trolley we had borrowed and trundled off down the hill, struggling to hold the front of the boat up. A light-bulb moment of genius saw us split our kayak paddle and poke it through the strap on the boat, making a reasonably comfortable handle for two. We got on the water and started off, then realised we had left our GPS tracker back at the gear boxes. Not sure if this was a compulsory item of equipment or not, we turned around and I "sprinted" up the hill to get it. Back on the water 7 minutes after we first got there and off to 57, 59, 61 and 62. The nice little walk up the creek to 62 took forever with Rob's dodgy ankle not enjoying the boulder hopping. We eventually made it back to the boat and off to 58 and the wharf. It was now 10.09am and we decided to give the orienteering a go. A quick look at the map confirmed that the course suited Rob's ankle in that most contouring would be right foot up. Rob put his map away and followed close behind, demanding that no time be lost! We knew it would be a close call but figured that we would still gain points even if we were a few minutes late. In the end, we were 2 mins 2 secs late (well, Rob was; I was 1 min 59...) and so said goodbye to the 30 points which would have had us even with Richard and Tamsin.

All that was left now was to enjoy the lunch, prize-giving and a well earned shower. And then to not enjoy the cleaning and packing up of muddy shoes and red-dirt encrusted bike tyres – I never knew how hard that stuff was to scrub off!! Soon we were back on the plane and out for the count.

A huge thanks to Liam and his crew of helpers for putting on such a fantastic event. We are still buzzing about it and can't wait for the next one!

Marquita Gelderman and Rob Garden.