

No blisters but plenty of vistas

Joel Mackay, Team 21 (with Jonathan Worswick)

Score 1740



It was a great day for a rogaine all right. Jonathan and I spent the whole day trailing the Richard x 2 team around the course after seeing the two young pups from Canberra orienteering circles racing off into the distance (and then racing back again as they took a wrong turn 100 m from the start...). I had estimated, with my trusty piece of string, that it was going to be 55 km to get all of the checkpoints – or 50 km if you left out CP10, which Martin had evilly put at the far end of Patonga Beach to foil people who were trying to get all of the CPs. So, our strategy was to get to the decision point for CP10 (somewhere around CP80) near the end of the event, so that we would have an idea whether we had time to try to grab it or not – nothing worse than getting back 45 min early and finding another team arrive right on the hooter having gathered that extra 10 pointer!

So, that meant the route started off something like:

23-48-61-37-24-25-36-26-49-39-28-47

All fairly straightforward so far. The coffee shops marked on the map was a nice touch I thought, but there was no time for that....

Our first mistake came at 81. As we ran past the signs advertising the tip, we noted that it was open every day and ticked that answer on the sheet, not quite noticing that there was a '7 days' option too. That nearly came back to haunt us.

After 52, we ran up to the trail junction NW of 54 and dropped our bags. We then set off (first aid kits in hand) for 34-101-53 – enjoying the views from Mt Wondabyne. We then made the call to take the direct route to 62 - the scrub didn't look too bad from where we stood. Our view changed about half way to 62, where it degenerated to ti-tree garbage that you had to stand *on* to get through. Richard Robinson and Tamsin Barnes cheekily hitched a ride behind us, letting me do most of the swearing and bashing while they sashayed along in my wake. They assured me that the Queensland Champs next year, up in the Atherton Tablelands, wouldn't have any of this sort of stuff – that wasn't much consolation though.

From 62, we regathered our bags and hit 54 and 63, seeing on the way our first semi-delirious 100-mile 'runner' staggering his way to Patonga. We then executed the out-and-back to 51 and 70 – beautifully marked with tape (thank goodness) – and then collected 71 and scrambled up to 100. We were greeted

there with the sight of a dozen or so rogainers having picnics, as well as Richard x2 taking each other's photos. Taking the rare opportunity to leave them behind, we skittered off down the slope towards 43 and 41, knowing that the Richards would be tiptoe-ing delicately through the bush section. Dropped bags at the locked gate and gathered 33 and 42 out-and-back – another minor tactical blunder, as I hadn't thought to take the side trail that led more directly to 35. Anyway, grabbed 35 just as the two Canberra boys reeled out of the bush, apparently highly dehydrated and saying that they had to head to Patonga just to get water. I *had* wondered why one of them didn't have any pack at all at the start! Collected 50 and arrived at 80 with Richard x2, duly had our photo taken with them and, following a brief consultation, decided that neither of us were going to head to Patonga for the 10-pointer.

At that point, some subtle interrogation revealed that Richard x2 hadn't nailed 25 and 36 at the start of the day, so we were 50 points ahead of them with about 1.5 hours to go and in the same physical location. It seemed like we were in good shape to nail them – even if they had time to go up and get 25+36, we should finish before them... And if we nail *them*, we are in with a good shot overall...

Right, so, we gathered 60 (aided by two kind souls who called out "Over here" as we blundered through the bush) and then popped out on the road near the Arboretum. Rx2 headed off to 45, and we spent too long deciding whether we could cunningly cut through said Arboretum. Eventually we did (and very pleasant it was), collected 32 and then picked up 45, 31, 21 and 20 – resisting the temptation for a swim. We scratched out heads for some time at 30 – there were abundant signs facing different directions – and took a stab that it was Private Property. From there, I had planned that we would just nip straight across to 29, then collect 40, 46 and 27 in a loop. However, a closer examination of the map revealed a couple of XXX's just to the west of 30 that I hadn't noticed before, which forbade us from using the footpath to 29. So, there was a lengthy amount of fiddling around the western edge of the caravan park, trying in vain to get across the inlet there without ending up in someone's back yard. Alas, we had no such luck and in the end had to go almost back to the HH to get out onto Mt Ettalong Rd, cursing all the way. Back down to 29, and then scuttle up the hill to 40 – which took longer than expected as we struggled to find the path at the bottom. We then took a punt that we could get across the creek between 40 and 46 – the two little road ends pointing towards each other seemed to be telling us there would be a way across. Fortunately, there was and we slogged around to 46 as time rapidly disappeared. We only had a few minutes to get back, but I figured that the 40 points would buy us 4 minutes, which seemed worth it.

Tragically, I momentarily lost my bearings as we emerged from the footpath west of 27 in a mad panic, so didn't collect it and the ticking clock made us hightail it straight back to the finish. We still ended up 3 minutes late, meaning that our missing of 27 together with the 3 minute penalty evened out with Rx2 missing those other two checkpoints, and since they finished before us, they emerged victorious, pipping us only on time difference. The final scores had them ahead of us by 10 points, but either way, they took out the event in style and left us languishing in second place. We did get the consolation of winning the "Best slightly aged people" category though, due to our advanced years. And the piece of string? Turned out to misjudge our distance by 1% - not bad for a piece of string...!

All in all, a fantastic location for an event and some great checkpoint locations. Organization seemed slick and drama-free, the admin crew were cheerful and helpful and the weather was great. What more could you want?! Well, maybe revenge - bring on the Metrogaine...

Joel Mackay and Jonathan Worswick