

## NSW ROGAINING CHAMPS – GONE W’RONG

Mount Werong, 50km south of Oberon, 110km north of Goulburn, proved to be a wonderful location for the recent NSW Rogaining Championships on the 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> October. The entire course was open, native forest, with plenty of clean, drinkable creeks and almost no cliffs, and the competition was close and exciting.

It was the same area used for the 2009 Champs, including the same hash house site on the old, overgrown landing strip but there were a few differences, foremost of these being:- no drizzle, sleet or snow. This year we were treated to perfect springtime conditions, down to 4-5° at night, sunny and 15-17° during the day. The predicted weather change moved in slowly Sunday morning but the first drops of rain didn’t appear until the event organisers had packed away all the equipment, and were ready to head home about 3pm.

The competition was also quite different. In 2009, Mike Hotchkis and Jonathan Worswick were clear winners ahead of Jean Douglass & Ron Simpson. This year there was an extremely close result, with the top three teams only ten points apart from each other. When you consider the variability of the terrain, the near-infinite options for choosing a course, and the variables associated with fitness and mental fatigue for 24 hours, it’s intriguing that the results were so compacted. Full results are on the NSWRA [website](#) but here’s the top five teams:

1. Gill Fowler & Phil Whitten .. 2,960 points
2. Ronnie Taib & David Williams .. 2,950
3. Andrew Black & Joel Mackay .. 2,940
4. Julie Quinn & Alex Ramsey .. 2,790
5. Ian Brown & Andy Macqueen .. 2,570

Gill Fowler is recently returned from a 100-mile (170km) run around the Monte Rosa massif, on the Italian-Swiss border. Joel Mackay also strengthened his quads on Monte Rosa, running the “short” 116km course, while Julie Quinn and Andy Macqueen are returned with honour from the World Rogaining Champs in Latvia. These are all impressive athletes who can travel long distances at pace - day and night.



Gill & Phil finished with three minutes to spare

Reviewing their excursion, Gill said, “We were genuinely surprised to win as we didn’t push the pace all the way, and we were disappointed at missing the last two controls we aimed for. The first 6-8 hours were great but then the north-east slowed us down, with steep legs that were unavoidable. While we went fairly directly between controls we were scrambling small cliffs ... it got slow at times. There was one special log-walk across a waterfall ... probably not too sensible, but I didn’t know til after we’d crossed it!”

Phil Whitten commented, while munching a sausage sandwich in the hash house, that he’d made many more navigational errors than usual, to which Gill responded, “But what is *usual*? He hasn’t done a 24-hour rogaine for over four years, so his nav wasn’t too bad, and I left him in front for most of the time.”

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**Every team had their own adventures, successes and otherwise, as is the nature of a 24-hour rogaine.**

Dave Williams was philosophical about the difficult, eastern side of the course, “It was much slower and more arduous than expected, with scrub in the creeks and on the ridges, a lot of downed timber to trip over, and quite rocky. The western side of the course was rogaining bliss by comparison – open grassy woodland. We should probably be thankful for the tough eastern section as it catered for our style ... it helped slow down the runners.”

“Heading east *was* the best tactic though. It let us recalibrate our route after our times completely blew out, and big country is better at night because the features are so much better defined. If you went west first you’d end up thrashing around the eastern boundary on Sunday morning!”

Contemplating how they could have gained a few more points to get the win, Dave offered one significant incident and some typical empathy for his teammate. “The All-Night-Café is where we went W’rong. We came out of the east mentally damaged, landing on the fire trail above 57 in the wee hours of Sunday morning, rather bugged and a bit over it. The sweet, sweet siren song of the ANC’s toasty fire and hot soup was perfectly positioned and timed to take full toll. I think we indulged for 40 minutes or so - outrageous! As a consolation, Joel and Andrew got lured on to the rocks as well, visiting just after us. There are also the usually lame excuses about blown knees and broken bodies. Ronnie did whinge a lot but I did my best to ignore him and go faster.”

David was probably correct about the impact of their ANC stopover. Gill and Phil had a brief 10-minute break at the main Hash House which could have been the vital difference in the final scores.

Coordinator for the event, Richard Sage, summarised, “Everyone seemed to enjoy the course, a competition course not giving any points away but offering a good mix of easy, open country closer in and steeper, rougher further out. And who could have predicted the close finish? Truly any of the top teams could have won ... the best sort of competition.”



Ronnie Taib & Dave Williams look happy to have finished

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Creation of the NSW Champs required extensive effort by a large group of people. Toni Bachvarova and Andrew Smith commenced exploration and access negotiations with National Parks a few months beforehand.

Andrew reported that “it did end up being a bigger project than we originally anticipated, but on the whole it was all a positive experience. We enjoyed it. All up we spent ten 2-day weekends in the area:- one weekend scouting, five weekends setting, two weekends flag hanging, the event itself, and one final weekend of flag retrieval.”

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Toni was positive about course setting as a great reason to be in the bush. “Even during our latest visit, collecting the last flags, it was a very enjoyable experience walking in the bush, enjoying the birds and the wild flowers. We managed to see a lot of wildlife in our time there, including a Wedge-tailed Eagle scavenging on a carcass on the road, wombats, kangaroos and wallabies, numerous birds, from Yellow-tail Cockatoos, Gang-gangs, Choughs through to Crested Shrike-tit, Golden Whistler, Friarbirds, various Honeyeaters, Flame Robins, Striated and Spotted Pardalotes, Striated and Brown Thornbills, Superb Fairy-wrens and many more. Our favourite camp site was near Mt Werong - a nice flat grassy area surrounded by tall gum trees where sugar gliders and owls could be seen at night.”

One could ponder if anyone knows that area as well and Toni and Andrew now do, given they have criss-crossed it so many times and gone places a normal person wouldn’t stray.



**Adrian Watson, Ben Berriman & Tony Kelshaw (winners of the 8-hour) moving fast through afternoon shadows**

Andrew continued his story about the course, “After the scouting weekend and getting general agreement from National Parks to go ahead, we plotted a course that would fit nicely on an A2 1:25000 map that tried to take advantage of the nicest terrain. We tried to set a course that the top teams would think they might be able to clean up but would actually fall a little short. So we over estimated a little here.”

“When we set, we visited all but a few control locations together. This was less efficient but allowed us to discuss the suitability of each location on the spot. And there were a surprising number of places where we had to move the control to a place that more accurately reflected the terrain. (I was alarmed at how inaccurate the marking of the creeks and contours were in some places!) In the end I think we produced a better course this way.”

“There were a few changes to our original plan. We removed some of the far eastern controls because the scrub was getting too horrible. We removed a control close to the hash house because it was a straight line across the Cullens private property, and we added a few more controls close to the hash house to make it more interesting for teams that don't travel as far.”

“Toni spent a significant amount of time doing all the map work and seeking a printer who would print on water/rip-proof Teslin paper for a price that was not astronomical. In the end we had to

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settle for coated paper and got 200 printed for around \$190 - a very good price thanks to Toni's contacts.”

“In the Setters Notes we encouraged people towards the west where it is just a pleasure to walk and we weighted the points a bit on the western side, so were a bit surprised when all the top teams (except Andy and Ian) decided to go east first. We felt OK about the worst scrub and steepness in the far east because only the gun teams would go there (well, almost OK - I was a bit worried about getting between 77 and 81 after I experienced it flag hanging).”

Dave Williams complimented the course setters, saying, “All the features used were fair and controls accurately placed. Plenty of different route choices and no obvious loops made for fun planning.”

Ronnie Taib was similarly positive, “I loved the fact that the course was set for rogainers, not for setters, in the sense that there was no fish-boning from the roads, and points set in nice, hard locations because, well, they were meant to be there. It made planning pretty challenging, with many options for all to choose from, one of the key components of a great rogaine. In terms of scenery, the area doesn't offer as many lookouts as Bungonia did, but it was quite pleasant bush and the absence of tracks for most of our route was a delight.”

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Meanwhile Richard had come on board to coordinate the many elements and people. He commented that things have improved greatly for event coordinators since he last organised a rogaine – the Cooks River Metrogaine in 2003. He does have a good track record in creating rogaines, heavily involved with the 1998 NSW Champs at Lstock and the 2000 Australian Champs at Gundy.



**“The Trailers are Packed!” [L-R] Richard Sage, Nejdet Danis, Petrea Stuart, Sema Danis, Nihal Danis, Vivienne de Remy de Courcelles, Toni Bachvarova & Andrew Smith**

Of this rogaine at Mount Werong, he reported, “Event administration is now handled by an experienced, dedicated team. In this case Vivien was running the show, so I didn’t need to worry about entries and registration, results, even the petty cash on the day. This huge part of the event is now just taken care of, with Chris Stevenson handling online presence and results, and with such proficiency. Thank you, Vivien and Chris.”

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“I was just as fortunate with the course setting and vetting team, led by Toni and Andrew. We agreed on a split of the tasks early on, and then they just went off and produced a great course, with an excellent map. And all with such good humour and seeming ease that they fitted in a month OS to participate in the Worlds in Latvia.”

“NSWRA now has a longstanding arrangement with Bush Search and Rescue. A few friendly emails and this well organised and efficient group, led by Leslie Clarke, were booked in for safety patrols, first aid and water drop maintenance.”

“Which just left the basics for me to arrange: access, safety, infrastructure, transport and catering. Blue Mountains National Park have a straightforward if comprehensive application process, but I found staff helpful and keen to assist. We took some time, until the course was finalised, to determine if we were inside or outside the Schedule 2 Lands (Warragamba Catchment) which would have required a further application to WaterNSW. We were outside.”

“Unlike 2009, we were in the middle of a winter drought. Would it be a short spring? Would we be allowed to have a fire? What if we had a Total Fire Ban? I was planning the contingency menu: no cooked food, no tea or coffee. It was looking like sandwiches, watermelon and cordial. Fortunately it didn't come to that.”

“I quickly found that we were sharing the weekend with the Bathurst races, although the basics of tents and toilets were easily available. Finding a water carter willing to make the trip out to the event site proved harder, but eventually one was found. Similarly, but less successfully, nobody wanted to deliver less than 300kg of firewood.”

“I Umm’ed and Aah’ed a bit about getting a satellite phone. There was little or no network service on the course or at the HH. I knew we were unlikely to need one in an emergency situation, but who knows, better to be prepared! In the end, it was critical to the success of the event.

1. Whoops, we don't have a generator in the Admin Trailer, the event coordinator hires one. In this case a phonecall to Nejdett in Sydney who hired one and brought it along on Saturday;
2. The guys putting up the marquees on Friday afternoon found they had two middle sections and only one end. They called head office and arranged a special delivery.”

“It's getting increasingly difficult to find volunteers for events so, running out of options, I had to fall back on arm-twisting my family to step up for HH catering. The Victorian RA online catering resources proved very useful for recipes and quantities, the dedication of team, and the secret family Bolognese recipe made for much favourable comment about the food. We should not forget the great efforts of Keith Fone and friends who manned the All Night Café with such efficiency. They are such a pleasure to deal with.”

“In an overly ambitious moment, before entries had even opened, I arranged for a large bus to meet the Lithgow train, for those that did not want to drive. This used to be a more popular service. Nowadays it is marginal. With a total of eight takers, a late change was required to replace the bus with a minibus. The bus numbers reflected disappointing overall entry numbers of 145, including both 8 and 24 hour events.”

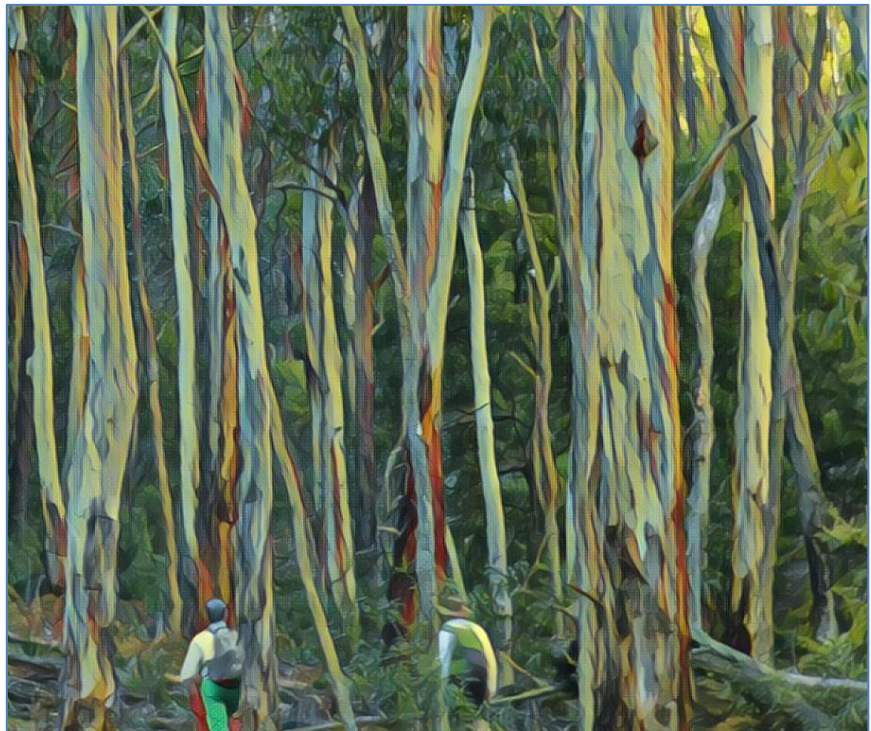
“One of the ongoing mysteries of organising an event is how to fit everything back into the catering trailer. It just sort of expands as you take it out, and it needs an expert to put it all back in. I think

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this is why Trev is President. He is one of the few who still know the tricks to getting it all back in. In spite of competing, he wasn't going home until the trailer was packed, which we achieved under presidential direction.”

“With the event over, the trailer safely home, the equipment repairs and replacements list passed to our highly effective equipment officer, Mark von Huben, and the bills sent off to treasurer Mike for payment, I've had time to reflect. Yes it is worthwhile volunteering. It's not until you do that you

appreciate just how much effort goes into each event, and how many people are quietly doing their bit, usually just quietly and effectively. You've heard it before, and you will hear it again. The shortage of volunteers is chronic. Nobody has an effective solution, but it's clear that if volunteering doesn't improve, events will change. And if participation in 24-hour events remains low, these annual events need to be put on the threatened species list.”



Thankyou to all the people who created the 2017 NSW Rogaining Championships:

- ✓ Coordinator: Richard Sage
- ✓ Course Setting, Mapping, Flag Hanging: Andrew Smith & Toni Bachvarova
- ✓ Vettors: Vivien & Justine de Remy de Courcelles, Emmanuelle Convert & Andrew Duerden
- ✓ Admin: Vivien de Remy de Courcelles
- ✓ Safety: Leslie Clark & the team from BSAR
- ✓ Catering: Petrea Stuart, Sema Danis, Nihal Danis, Nejdet Danis, Sue Jackson
- ✓ All Night Café: Keith & Fiona Fone, Nigel and Cath Walsh & the 1st Waitara Scouts groupies
- ✓ Roustabout: David Stone
- ✓ Catering Trailer: Richard Sage
- ✓ Admin Trailer: Pam & Bob Montgomery
- ✓ Equipment: Mark von Huben
- ✓ Website & Results: Chris Stevenson
- ✓ Volunteers: Graham Field
- ✓ Flag Collection: Andrew Smith, Toni Bachvarova, Pam & Bob Montgomery, Ian Almond, Chris Stevenson, John Clancy, Ronnie Taib & his cousin.

