

NSW Rogaine Association 2013 State Championships

Event Report

Getting There

We drove to the event Friday afternoon, taking about 2 hours from door to door. It was an uneventful trip though Mangrove Mountain, past Broke and down Putty Road to Dave Thurston's place at Garland Valley. Rochelle was in charge of the music as usual and we stopped for my espresso coffee fix. The afternoon was too hot to have the roof open so the local residents and wildlife were lucky not to 'benefit' from her renditions of '30 Seconds to Mars' and 'Meatloaf'!

Bert and Ian were there to meet us and 3 other teams had already arrived. The weather was still warm, about 25°C, and smoke from the Blue Mountain bush fires well south of us polluted the air.

We quickly selected a campsite and set up our tent and gear before helping Bert and Ian with preparing the event administration gear. As the sun set the temperature dropped quickly and we cooked our usual camping dinner of 2-minute noodles, chilli salmon/tuna, peas and tomato paste.

Early to bed as sleep would soon be a luxury. The full moon and temperature gave us a good indication of how cold and bright Saturday night was going to be.

Race Preparation - Saturday

With sunrise at 6am we both woke early – I wondered whether that was a good thing as we would get little sleep that night. The birds were up and so were Ian and Bert. We wolfed down our first breakfast (cereal, milk powder, water and banana) and again offered our assistance in finishing preparations. Registration was at 8am and the number of teams arriving steadily grew as the morning progressed.

Rochelle gathered our maps, course setter's guide and intentions sheet whilst I got our rogaining gear out of the car. Now the fun began... how to plot a course to get as many points within 24-hours without killing ourselves!

Thankfully the course area was not large and the controls fairly evenly spread. The downside was no Tea & Damper station and no water drops in the South and West of the course. The lack of a Tea & Damper station was a bit of a blow as our plan relied on food and water from there. The maps 20 meter contours were also going to add a further challenge as we are used to navigating with 10 meter contours.

Our plan is to go hard during the first 7 hours of daylight, have a rest and refuel/ rehydrate at sunset, go again until midnight before having another rest and refuel/ rehydrate. Go again until 2-3am at which point we will bed down on the forest floor and sleep for 2-3 hours. Wake at sunrise and go hard for the last 6 hours.

Fitting our plan to the map is a lot easier than we both expected, although we would have to take a risk with water. With no water drops in the west or south and no Tea & Damper station means we will have to rely on finding ground water in one of the two main creeks. There is supposed to be standing water in Boggy Swamp Creek - this will have to do. We will include an emergency break out point in our route plan in case things get critical.

I colour in the controls whilst Rochelle checks out the arriving teams to see who we know. Our approach to route planning is methodical and based on experiences from the past 4 years rogaining and hiking. We quickly put together our first control and time/distance intervals plan and review it

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against our average daylight and night speeds. Not bad... a few minor adjustments and the total time/distance are within our limits and the number of points will give us a good score. Each control has a two-digit number. The first multiplied by 10 is the point score and the second number identifies the control. Our goal for the event is to win the Family Category and get a top 3 placing in the Open Mixed Category. The latter is a big ask but if you don't try you don't succeed.

With route planning done Rochelle completes the intention sheet and hands it in. This will at least allow the organisers to find our bodies if the sky falls in! Now time to pack our gear. Having not completed a 24-hour event before this is going to be interesting – what to take and what to leave out. We are taking our two light weight sleeping bags and ponchos as it is going to be cold when we sleep. We also are taking 'skins' leggings, thermal short sleeve tops and light weight jumpers for the night. The remaining gear in our packs comprises of 2lt water bladder each, head lights, energy food, emergency water bottle and first aid kit.

Whilst final preparations are underway we have our second breakfast – cheese & spam rolls and a banana each plus a litre of water. Planning and packing gear is completed with an hour and half to go so we catch up with friends and review our route plan.

Start – Saturday

By midday the temperature was in the high 20°c's and likely to remain there for the rest of the afternoon. We donned gaiters, hats and packs before walking over to the start area for final briefing. At midday Saturday the race begins for both the 24 hours and 6 hour teams.

Our first control was #25, 500m along the flat before climbing 50m on to a ridge with the control flag a further 200m in a saddle. The saddle must be shallow as it's not shown on the map. We start off at a brisk pace with a number of other teams, some who are running. There is a track for part of the way so the navigation is straight forward and we hit the control within 15 minutes.

Next control is #45, a watercourse junction 500m downhill, so I take a bearing off the ridge and we head out with Rochelle up front. I call the line and advise her to look out for a track in 300m. We quickly find the track, where a few teams are milling about and we keep going on the same bearing till we come to the creek. We turn right as I had taken an off bearing to the left of the control. Navlight to wrist band and another 40 points collected

We walk a short distance North West to a track and follow this 500m to a distinct bend from where we can see control #34, a short climb to the South. At this point Rochelle takes a time check and we are 15 minutes ahead of our planned time already. We often gain time in the early part of a race which is important as the harder controls are yet to come.

For control #44 we have to climb on to the ridge and then head South West to a knoll. I am not taking bearing as the terrain is obvious and easily related to the map. After 500m and a short climb we see the flag.

Control #52 is the track/water course junction in a wide gully 500m North North West. The bush is still open and easy to traverse so we move quickly downhill and make up more time. We are both feeling very confident and the heat is not getting to us.

From #52 we head off along the gully in a Northerly direction for 750m to control #62. Another team are heading in the same direction and we travel just behind them to the flag. The bush here is pretty

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and green for a change. Still no problems with navigating and 240 points are in the bag after one and a half hours.

I take a bearing to control #79, a rocky gully 600m West over two joined ridges. We set off for the first ridge and cross a saddle after a short sharp climb before crossing over the second ridge. The flag is $\frac{3}{4}$'s of the way down and not hard to find. There are three other teams at the control but nobody we know.

Control #66 should be straight forward as it's another track/water course junction and the track should be at the foot of the gully we are in. We head down and find the track although it seems to be higher up than the map suggests. We turn left and after 500m come to a fork in the track which is not marked on the map. The two teams ahead take the left branch which heads in the right direction but goes over a ridge. The other track follows the gully which is what the map suggests. We decide to take the left branch but after reaching the ridge line the track heads further South and up which is wrong. After a quick conference we both agree to leave the track and head down to the water course we can see below us. We come again to a track and turn left. Soon we pass a fork in the watercourse, where we make a mark on the track as it's the turn off point for our next control, and after a further 200m we find the flag. We are 50 minutes ahead of our planned time interval for this control so take the opportunity to sit in the shade for a few minutes and have a muesli bar.

Control #78 is 1km away and another rocky watercourse. We head back along the track to our marker before heading west beside a creek. We are on another indistinct track heading in the right direction but not marked on the map. We count the watercourse junctions; there should be one on the left and then the one we want on the right. We don't see a watercourse on the left but come to a rocky watercourse on the right, although it seems closer than the map suggests. We head up it but soon come to a cliff wall. Another team is coming towards us and tells us it is not the right one. Rather than heading back down we gamble it is in the next gully and head over the ridge. We find the control a few minutes later.

Control #76 is on the ridgeline above us but it is too steep to go straight up and the undergrowth is very thick and scratchy. We head on to the spur running east hoping the undergrowth will thin out and the gradient easier. After a steep climb and bash through thick scratchy scrub we make it to the top of the main ridgeline. I fail to take a bearing believing the ridgeline we can see is the correct one and we waste 10 minutes going down it. From the end we can see the ridge we should be on and skirt the northern contour line to get us back on track. Finding the control is easy after that. We are now only 15 minutes ahead of our planned time interval.

The scrub is thick, scratchy and hard work and does not let up all the way to control #91. I take a bearing along the narrow ridge line which is easy enough to follow as the edges are steep and count the north running spurs until we come to the correct gully. There is no wind and we are both sweating heavily. The checkpoint description is 'the head of watercourse' – not quite accurate as the head is very narrow and close to the top of the ridge whilst the control should be 200m further down. We rock hop down the very steep gully and find the flag. We have a short breather plus another muesli/energy bar. We are three hours into the race and our water is more than half gone... it's going to be a close call.

Control #84 is about 1.5km away along the same ridge and should be on the third knoll. It's a long climb out and the scrub does not let up. Our knees are taking a beating from the prickly bush. We

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are still not having problems navigating which keeps our morale high and we continue to push hard to the checkpoint.

Control #74 is a kilometre away, over the next large knoll and down a western spur. Shortly after leaving #84 we come across what looks like a recently created 4-wheel drive track. Strange place to take a drive but our knees aren't complaining. We leave the track at the top of the spur which forks to form a gully with the flag in this watercourse. We find another indistinct track which heads down the eastern spur beside the gully. I am loath to follow it but the scratchy scrub puts me off bush bashing so we plan to cut back to the watercourse after we have gone a little further down. We head left into the gully and turn right at the watercourse still heading down. We get near the bottom and no control – damn it must have been above us. We back track up for 150m and find the flag under a 3m cliff. Both our bladder packs are now empty and we drink half our emergency reserve – we are both feeling a little dehydrated. We have an apple but need to share as it seems the other one has fallen from Rochelle's pack.

We are still 15 minutes ahead of our planned time and have collected 750 points in 5 hours. We are buoyant and keen to move on to control #81. We head down the gully again and up the opposite ridge. It's a long hard climb up although the scrub is a little thinner. At the top we head south west to the knoll we can see 400m away. Another 80 points gained and we even increased our lead time to 20 minutes. The sun is now low on the horizon which assists in navigating west.

From control #81 we head down the western spur to Boggy Swamp Creek and hopefully water. It is a very steep downhill and technically difficult but we reach the bottom in 15 minutes. Well Boggy Swamp Creek is a sandy dry creek bed with no visible water. We only have 200ml of water between us. Control #90 is a spur off the western arm of the creek so we head off in that direction. It is easy going as the creek bed is wide and open. A short climb and we reach the flag – we are now at the most north western edge of the course.

We head east back along the creek to the junction and then south along a track following Boggy Swamp Creek. There are a few small stagnant water holes and there are signs water is running under the sand. Control #75 is 2km further south but it is very easy going and the air temperature has dropped to low 20°c's. Although we don't see a suitable water hole we are confident there will be no need to take our emergency route to the dams 3-4 km's away. Shortly before the flag, which is visible from the track, we find a descent water hole with clear water and are able to refill our bladders and emergency bottle – to say we are jubilant is an understatement! A passing team is a little incredulous at our drinking this water but we are confident in our bush skills – we have made sure there are no dead animals upstream, there are copious frogs and the water is flowing through a sandy base.

We have now been going 6 hours 15 minutes and the sun is setting. Our score is a healthy 990 points and we are 400m south of control #75. Time for our planned break and as we are ahead of where we had intended Rochelle proposes we take an hour, eat our dinner and have a lie down, giving time for the water to reduce our dehydration.

Saturday Night

One of our ponchos is spread on the sandy creek bed as a groundsheet and we remove shoes and socks – our feet love the fresh air. After putting on our 'skins' leggings and thermals we lie down and each eat a spam and cheese roll, a muesli bar and chocolate. The mosquitos are bad but covering up allows us to get 30 minutes of good rest.

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Our next control is supposed to be #82 but considering the darkness and its technical nature we opt for control #85 which is about the same distance, in the right direction and should be easier. We set off with headlights on and feeling relaxed. Our feet have benefited from the rest. The track we had been following has stopped so we follow the creek line which is easy to negotiate. The checkpoint is a watercourse off another watercourse heading east from Boggy Swamp Creek. We find the junction without difficulty and head up the eroded gully. The tracks of other competitors are clearly visible and we take the correct left hand watercourse to find the flag. We are finding we don't need our thermals on so strip back down to just long sleeve shirts.

Control #72 is another watercourse off a watercourse heading west from Boggy Swamp Creek, with a track following the latter watercourse. After retracing our footsteps from #85 we head south down Boggy Swamp Creek, measuring the distance and time to get to the correct junction. There are a lot of frogs about and we have to watch our step – don't snakes like frogs? We turn right into the watercourse but quickly find it impenetrable and have to retrace our steps. We now see where other competitors have climbed up to what should be the track and follow their trail. We gain the track and move along it cautiously as it's not the same as the map. At a point where the track crosses the watercourse we drop into the gully and move west along it – we are looking for a watercourse junction on our left. We come to one and although it does not feel right to me (I don't think we have gone far enough) we head into it and start climbing. The flag should be 150m further along but after 250m we find nothing – our morale drops suddenly and Rochelle cracks - time for a break, drink and energy bar.

After a few minutes I suggest she remains where we are and I will head further up to see if I can see anything that will help us. After 50m I can see the top of the ridge which confirms we are not in the right gully. I return to Rochelle who is now ready to go again so we head back down to the junction and turn left. We meet another team who mention this checkpoint is very tricky, which at least gives us confidence we are now heading in the right direction. A little further on we come across another team who are looking for the same control but have had a very hard time getting here and unsure of their exact location – we join forces and soon find the checkpoint above a cliff up a very indistinct watercourse on the left. I should have followed my instinct at the first watercourse, the 20m contour intervals meant it was not shown on the map. We have spent an hour getting #72 so we are now 30 minutes behind our planned interval time.

Our morale is high once again and as the team we are with is also heading to control #50 we head off together. Rochelle enjoys the company and is soon chatting away – a good sign. We return to the track and follow it south. The checkpoint is 600m away up the only watercourse crossing the track and is easy to find. It is now 11.30pm and from here our planned route will take us east towards the Hash House and finish.

Control #40 is only 500m away but a top a cliff. We head back along the track 200m in hope of skirting the cliff, then drop down into Boggy Swamp Creek where we happen upon some friends. They are struggling having suffered from heat and dehydration during the day and are feeling worse for wear. They change their plans and come with us. We start up the steep bank only to find we are still blocked by the cliff however a fissure allows us to scale the 8m face – it's a good thing it is dark as I doubt I could have done it in daylight. Once on top we are able to follow a track south to the control and collect the 40 points.

Control #41 is 1km back along the same track, in a watercourse on the other side of a ridge. The other team decide to take a break but our friends continue with us. We make good time and soon

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round the ridge and head east. The track is much closer to the gully than the map indicates but finding the watercourse is easy and we start climbing up. It quickly becomes steep but we come to the checkpoint shortly afterwards.

From here we continue up to the top of the ridge, hoping to find another track. We have regained some of our lost time and both of us are feeling strong and awake – it is now 1.30am. Even though our plan is to sleep in an open area 1km east we decided to go for another control before stopping. Checkpoint #83 is a dam near the valley floor off a ridge which the track we are on follows. We start walking the 1.5km east in bright moonlight and the going is very easy – we enjoy walking with our headlights off. Soon we come to the open area where we will sleep and head down a spur towards the dam. There has been a bush fire recently which makes the going easy. After finding the dam and flag we say goodbye to our friends who are not equipped to sleep out. We head back up to the clearing.

A quick scout around and we find a suitable sleeping spot beside a large log. We clip a poncho around each sleeping bag and put on our thermals and jumpers. Its 2.25am and I am sure we are both asleep in less than a minute.

Sunday Morning

I wake at 5.30am after a slightly restless sleep and wake Rochelle. We both comment on how warm and comfortable we were considering we had slept in the open and on the ground. We eat a couple of muesli bars and have some chocolate and water before moving out at 6am on the dot. We feel rested and both our feet and legs are only a little sore.

The first checkpoint is control #54, described as an old truck 50m west of the knoll a little over 1km north along the track. We make good time and climb up through scratchy bush to the old truck wreck and flag. The sun is now above the hills and the temperature is rising quickly – it is forecast to be 30°C.

Control #64 is another gully 1.5km east of our location. The track should take us most of the way there but I take a bearing anyhow. After 10 minutes the main track starts heading down along the east side of the ridge and a junction with an indistinct track running along the ridge neither of which is marked on the map. We start moving along the indistinct track for 400m before coming to the end of the ridge. There is a steep gully and we head down looking for the control. The map and the surrounding terrain do not match and we are definitely not where we should be! Near the bottom we see a large dam off to our left which means we are nearly 1km north of where we should be. Whilst we are working out what to do Rochelle spies another team, who happen to be one of the top NSW rogaining teams. Rochelle asks if they are also looking for control #64 but they remark they are not where they should be. It seems we have both been misled by the track and ridge. We decide the checkpoint must be two ridges east of our location and set off along the flat open grassland beside Burrowell Creek. We are correct in our assessment and find the flag 15 minutes later.

There's a water drop only 500m away and as we are again out of water we head in that direction. We refill bladders and emergency bottle and have a long drink before heading to control #65. We back track past control #64 to a junction of Burrowell Creek and head up the northern arm. It is still easy going as the ground is flat, grassy and open and we soon find the dam and checkpoint.

Control #35 is the knoll on a ridge 1km east. It is easy to see from the dam so we head off in that direction. It is an easy walk at the start but after 10 minutes we start heading up sharply and the

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climb is steep and through dense, scratchy brush. 10 minutes of solid climbing has us catching our breaths at the checkpoint. We are still making good time with 3.5 hours to go.

Control #55 is 1km away in a straight line south east across the valley. I take a bearing and start heading down the ridge and across a barb wire fence but after only a short period we are stopped by an impassable cliff. We head south following the fence line to a point where we can descend to the valley floor. We cross Greenwattle Arm creek where I take a bearing to the control. We head off north easterly along a track following the creek. After 400m we turn east and move up the wide shallow gully where the checkpoint should be. We spend 5 minutes searching but find nothing. It is very open so we should be able to see it easily – I hope Bert is not up to one of his tricks! I recheck the map and realise I took our bearing from the wrong point on the creek. The control should be 400m over a low ridge to the west. We head off quickly, crossing the ridge before dropping down into the gully where we find the control. 3 hours to go.

We head back over the low ridge to the track and follow it north east. We are well ahead of time and decide to add control #44 to our planned route. After 400m we come to a track junction and take the right hand fork heading down hill with a ridgeline running north on our left. After a further 200m we cut away from the track and onto a saddle at which point we follow the ridge 200m to the knoll and flag. 2 hours 40 minutes to go.

Control #20 is about 800m south but we will stick to the tracks as we will be quicker even if a little further. We retrace our steps to the track junction and then head east along another track for 400m till we come to a track junction. Here we meet one of the organiser's who's also looking for control #20. They have had many reports that it is not in the right location. As the checkpoint description is a shallow gully we decide to retrace our steps a little way, go down 50m from the ridge top, spread out and follow the contours east. This works and we quickly find the flag. We have plenty of time with a little over 2 hours 20 minutes to go and the next 5 controls are all close together.

Control #24 is a short 300m to the top of the ridge on a knoll to the east. Within 10 minutes we are at the flag.

We head east off the ridge to the track which we follow east for 400m to control #21.

Control #33 is a knoll 500m south along a ridge. I take a bearing and head off. It is an easy descent down the saddle before we come to a distinct sharp knoll on the saddle. It's not high enough to be on the map and we have not travelled far enough for it to be the right one but go up and over in case. No flag so we keep going along the ridge till we come to the next larger knoll where we find the checkpoint. 1hour 45 minutes to go.

We head down the gully south east of the knoll towards control #23 which is described as the north-western watercourse. It is in open grassland and the flag is easy to see hanging in a tree. We head over keeping an eye out for snakes.

Control #22 is our last planned checkpoint before reaching the Hash House and we have 1 hour 40 minutes to go. I take a bearing and head north east through open grassland. The control is only 500m away and up a watercourse. It is easy to locate and has taken only 10 minutes to get.

I take a quick bearing for the Hash House and we keep going. After a short climb through prickly undergrowth we come out near Dave Thurston's place and jog to the finish. 1 hour 20 minutes spare and we have collected a total of 1730 points.

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Finish& Results

After checking in we grab some much needed food and drink. We now realise how hungry and thirsty we are. Teams are arriving every few minutes giving us the opportunity to gauge how others found the course. It seems a number of teams had problems with control #72 but overall it's the heat, lack of water and scratchy bush that get the most comments. All the teams are in bar one team who arrive 15 minutes late. They will be penalised 150 points.

Whilst eating our second helpings of food we listen to the results and winners. The Open winning team from ACT completed the entire course in 18 hours 40 minutes – an incredible result as they must have run a lot of it. We came 15th in the Open category.

For the Family category our names are called and we collect the winner's trophy. Rochelle is very proud of our achievement as she should be - it's a fantastic effort for a 15 year old. We have come in 400 points ahead of the next Family team.

The Mixed Team results are called and we come 4th. I am very happy with our result considering the first two mixed teams are the event winners and the best mixed team in NSW, both having completed the entire course with time to spare.