

The 50th

Paddy Pallin Winter 6 Hour Rogaine

Organiser's Report

On a bright, clear sunny Sunday 242 teams and 638 people ran, walked and ambled off into the bush for the 50th Paddy Pallin Winter 6 hour rogaine. It was great to see so many old and new faces happily gearing up for a lovely winter's day ramble.

The course setters watched, somewhat stunned, as their plan to spread the field across the closer controls failed spectacularly and half the entrants charged up the track from the car park to 38. In our naivety, we thought routes 38, 22-47, 23-54 and 52-81 would probably get a fairly even spread and that the most competitive teams might do a bolt for 47 (or possibly 81) to get ahead of the pack and then spread S, N, or W from the Ironbarks picnic ground, leaving the close control for late pickings if they returned in time. Not the first time in history that wondrous plans have not survived contact with the enemy!

Fortunately, the rush to 38 did not seem to cause an extensive delay due to overcrowding at this control, with 3 navlight punches available to spread the load a bit. The tail of the queue moved quickly out of sight up the hill.

Another early stumble, having forgotten to have the intention sheets printed, was covered by some quick thinking by Sam in admin – ask people to write their team number and a list of the controls they intended to visit on a piece of paper and hand that in. In fact, this worked so well that I think it should become the standard method – no more guessing which direction a loop of controls should be traversed, or which loop is first if multiple hash house visits are planned. And for longer events, it would be more easily amended as teams pass back through the hash house.

Time at the hash house seemed to fly by. Quite a few teams transited through the hash house during the event, keeping us a posted on feelings about the various parts of the course. The most common was that the NE out to 101 was good, our marking of some of the routes between controls to the NW and W was dubious and controls to the south were slower than expected. Before long we were making preparations for the returning horde.

The scouts had the soups heating and salads chopped. The smell from the sausages and veggie patties on the barbie was mouthwatering. And the kookaburras thought so too, with a couple snatched out of sandwiches on the wing – much to the surprise of the victims and delight of the crowd. At Admin we had the finishing chute ready in good time, and completely forgot about the hi-viz vests which made finding a finish person to punch off the course a little harder than it should have been.

Paddy's son Robert and grandson Tim, and their partners Nancy and Chris had arrived earlier in the day and were soon happily pitching in with finish punches and scissors. Robert had helped organise and run that very first Paddy Pallin event at Euroka 49 years ago. Very generously, through the Paddy Pallin stores, they donated an excellent array of outdoor goods as "lucky team" prizes – in keeping with Paddy's focus on getting all people to participate in the great outdoors.

The category winners had to be content with their trophies and bragging rights. Congratulations to Andrew Hill and Richard Mountstephens, the open (and mens) winners, with a score of 1320 out of a total of 2240 points available on the course. They just squeezed out the second place getter Patrick Gunnarson and Glen Horrocks by a very narrow 10 point margin. David Lyle and Ian Cameron took out third place with 1150 points. The open mixed category was won by Gill Fowler and Joel Mackay with 1090 points. Gill and Joel are the current and ex president of NSWRA – it just goes to show that volunteering really helps your navigation and speed! Or should that be the other way around? The first women's team home was Alison Curtin and Sue Mahoney with 790 points.

It was a real pleasure to see so many family teams out enjoying themselves on the course – some with picnics and others pausing to admire the scenery. With more than 100 juniors entering we trust the sport will have very bright ongoing prospects.

One of the highlights of the day for me was Jemma returning, with parents in tow, from a dash down to 52 and telling me with a hugely satisfied smile that I was wrong, it didn't take them an hour round trip, only 40 minutes.

Safety for the day was excellent, with the worst injuries being scrub scrapes, a couple of sprains and a good sprinkling of blisters. The vast majority of teams were back on time, and those teams that were mis-placed or going to be late returning did a great job of letting us know by SMS, voice mail and/or phone – in some cases even getting other teams to send messages when they reached a mobile coverage area. This was a very good thought and one that should be incorporated into our "mobile safety" procedures.

Even having partial mobile coverage on the course was a real bonus. After we had worked out from the scoring system what teams were unaccounted for, we knew from messages by around 3:45 that all the teams were safe. Very good news for them, and a considerable relief for the organisers and BWRS. We did discover a hole in our procedures, with a couple of teams managing to get on the course with without having been fully registered.

With the heavy rain in the week before the event, my fear was that we would have to cancel due to closure of Glenbrook causeway or – probably worse – having 600 plus rogainers, scattered throughout the course with no method of fast recall, stranded on the wrong side of the creek by a cloudburst. So it was with enormous relief that I hung 52 just back from a little sandy beach by the picturesque moonlit Nepean River on Friday night and had a peaceful walk back to Euroka with glimpses of a starry sky through the trees. [Though the little pyre of reeds and twigs and empty can of two-stroke mix on the beach still puzzles me]. Saturday was overcast at dawn, with a light ground mist and the barest sprinkle of rain, but cleared to a beautiful day.

The morning of the event dawned bright and clear, if a tad chill, and the volunteers on car marshalling duty were at their posts by 6:00am, ready for a fast and furious few hours. A big thankyou to Nerise, Laura, Chris, Tyson, Clare, Jason and Julian, as well as to the drivers, for managing the parking so well.

Enormous thanks go to Warwick Dougherty for a fabulous job organising the course setting. Warwick's detailed knowledge of the tracks, gleaned from years of trail running and bushwalking in

the area, helped he, Marcin, Jason and me set a very entertaining course – not too tricky navigationally, avoiding the really dense scrub areas, a real planning challenge with quite tricky route choices and some really wonderful spots to visit. And many thanks also to Marcin and Jason for their appetite for scrub bashing, particularly in the south, to find suitable control locations; and to Alexa, Xanthe and David and Julian for a very thorough vetting job.

Flag hanging was left until the very end – with this section of the park being so busy and with quite a few controls actually on tracks, we didn't want to hang weeks in advance. Warwick and I set on Friday afternoon and evening, after the amenities like tents and toilets had been delivered. Saturday was the main hanging day, with Jason and Nick, Warwick and me out doing our bits. Warwick, after putting in a long hard day, hung the last flag 45 at around 7:30pm and had a swim/bath in Glenbrook Ck near the causeway – which he described, rather gently I thought, as “a bit nippy”.

With fewer campers than initially expected, they were able to spread out a bit and soon had quite a village atmosphere going. Saturday was a cool and clear night – the view from the Portal Lookout of the Sydney lights was really pretty. Its amazing to recall that when I abseiled here as a scout some 45 years ago, the city lights were just visible on the horizon, with a narrow ribbon along the Great Western Highway connecting to the Nepean bridge, with a bit of a spread at Penrith. Now it is a complete carpet of lights, from horizon to river and north and south as far as can be seen.

1st Waitara spoilt us again with their catering efforts, with a very tasty selection of soups and hot dishes for dinner on Saturday night and great soups, salads, sausages and vege burgers to fill very hungry tummies at the end.

In initial discussions with NPWS their guideline was of the order of 150 cars and 400 or so entrants. Following some discussions and a site meeting, we came up with a limit of 250 vehicles, 650 to 700 people (including volunteers) and around 200 campers overnight on Saturday. I felt that banking on averaging more than 2.5 people per car would be pushing it, so we set the entry limit at 650, with around 20 volunteers. As it turned out, we had 638 entrants on the day and 35 volunteers. From 242 teams we had 234 vehicles, and approximately 20 volunteer vehicles. While the one team/one car rule did cause some consternation, I'd like to very sincerely thank entrants for complying so readily – and also to those people who car pooled or provided car space at short notice at the entrance gate

We think that this is one of the largest, if not the largest, event staged out of Euroka Clearing.

Thanks to Aine Gliddon and Glen Meade and the area management team of BMNP South, as well as rangers Justin, Beth, Lois , Paul and John for all their support and good humour.

I hope that you enjoyed doing the event as much as the volunteers enjoyed preparing it!

With best regards, and hoping to see you at many more rogaines,

Michael Watts

Event organiser.