

Event Report – Dharug Dreamtime, 02 May 2015

Graham Field

The "Dharug Dreamtime" 2015 Autumn Rogaine was NSWRA's first bush rogaine for the year, combining both 6 and 12 hour events. The weather started out wet, then proceeded to go downhill from there. This did nothing to dampen the spirits or determination of the 246 competitors - if anything it added to the challenge.

The event was held in the Dharug National Park near Gunderman on the northern side of the Hawkesbury River, not far from Wisemans Ferry. The Hash House was at the picturesque Mill Creek Camping Area. The course encompassed scenic and rugged terrain, characterised by a web of bush covered ridges and valleys. Much of the course was in the wilderness, being designed to take advantage of national park walking trails, fire trails and roads, along with rocky ridgelines criss-crossed with informal trails beaten by students doing the Duke of Edinburgh Awards.

The damp weather leading up to the event brought out the leeches and mozzies – as if there weren't enough challenges already.

As the weather deteriorated, teams had to contend with rising creeks and worst of all, the once plain tracks close to the Hash House disappearing under water or obscured by the vegetation growing heavier by the minute. This unfortunately took its toll with a few injuries. Andrew Duerden, doing the 12 hr with daughter Rochelle, twisted an ankle after slipping off a grass tree stump a couple of hours in and managed to hobble back to the HH. Dom Pitot slipped and banged his head on a rock, fracturing his cheek and bleeding profusely. He was patched up (special thanks to Team 58, Tom, Floret and Jeff Meredith) and made it back to the HH with the help of his team. That was the 6hr. Winners with 1670 points were Team 82, Michael Burton and Andrew Brown.

By about 9pm, the main creek had turned into a raging torrent with reports of it being waist deep and correspondingly very dangerous to cross...for those who took a clockwise route, returning through 74 and 24. In this state, the track virtually disappeared and teams were having great difficulty finding the way home in the wet and dark. Most did and fortunately the creek began to drop and by 11pm it was reported to be under knee height, but still flowing hard.

There were a few late returns. About midnight, a call was received from Team 34 saying that they were lost. They described where they thought they were and the best minds at the HH, including Michael Watts, Martin Dearnley, Mike Hotchkis and Bert van Netten tried to guide them back to the track, without success. At 1am, Mike H and Graham Field headed out toward 74 to see if they could see their lights or attract their attention with whistles. No luck, but fortunately the missing team had phone reception and were in good spirits. Even though it was still raining, it was quite mild and the consensus was that the best course of action would be to stay put, get the space blankets out and stick it out till daylight. The big breakthrough was that lost team managed to use Google Maps to display a route back to Wisemans Ferry and send a screenshot of this back to Michael Watts. Using some clever extrapolation and scaling, it was determined that they were not where they thought they were, but actually in the middle of the 11km circuit, between 24 and 36. In the confusion of the rain and raging torrent, they had veered northwest up a creek line mistaking it for the main creek that the track followed. Having an approximate location to search now, 2 teams went out early on Sunday morning, heading into the zone from the north and south. They were located fit and well at about 9:30am. Fantastic result.

The 12hr was won by Gill Fowler and Jess Baker with 2370 points (from 2780 on course). It was great to see that there were smiles all round by the finishers, none bigger than Team 34 on Sunday morning.

Big thanks for making this a success go out to the course setters and veters - Lynn Dabbs, Kevin Williams, Martin Dearnley, Graham Field and Tristan White. Flag retrievers Marg and Rob Cook, John and Mardi Barnes fronted up the day after to do the event all over. Michael Watts did a magnificent job before, during and after the event in coordinating the event logistics as well as the search effort for the missing team. The Admin team of Belinda McLean, Anita Bickle and Chris Stevenson did a great job with the navlights, scoring and results. Thanks also to 'on the day' helpers David Dash, Tristan White, Adrian Plaskitt and Richard Sage and especially Mike Hotchkis and Bert van Netten who's experience greatly assisted in the late night/early morning search for the missing team. 1st Waitara Scouts once again turned on some great meals for hungry rogainers. Apologies to anyone that was missed.

Big thanks also to National Parks (especially Sarah Brooks & Frank Brincat) for allowing us to use the Mill Creek Camping area for the hash house and camping in particularly wet conditions. There's definitely more to be explored in this particular wilderness!