

## The Novice Perspective

Team: Half Rad

Members: Richard Old & Rob Marlow

Richard & I entered this event for both training and in an effort to learn some navigation skills. We are members of a four person team ([Fully Rad to the Power of Sick](#)) who enjoy Adventure Racing, did the [Geoquest Half](#) recently, and have entered a ten day epic scheduled for Cairns next May called [XPD](#).

Everything you read about compass based activities all focus on one aspect – practice. So it was off to the Lake Macquarie Rogaine to do exactly that, and wanting a bit of a workout, the 12 hour event appealed. I arrived around 9am and looked the part, setting up table & chairs, checked in and collected the map. I was fortunate to park next to a group of seasoned professionals and proceeded to pick up many clues simply by listening to their discussions. But I was only hearing parts of conversations and it gets to the point of information overload. The next two hours were a tad bewildering. Sure I can read a map, but so many options! Route planning is not easy first time round with checkpoints literally everywhere, no idea of the terrain, the number of kilometres one is likely to cover, day versus night, etc.

Finally I had a planned route and lodged the intentions map. Not over ambitious for first timers and definitely achievable, staying totally in the southern end of the course. Richard then turns up, a rush to get ready, glances at the map and says lets go that way – an anticlockwise loop heading north first! So whilst listening to both briefings I have this out of control feeling - logic, planning, a measured approach, all out the window and suddenly we are part of a large group venturing off to checkpoint 24.



An easy enough start and no great trouble knocking over 30 and 31 although first lesson learnt - follow your own bearings and do not be drawn by others heading off on tangents. Then a cross terrain bush bash and climb to 58 which in hindsight would have been easier to head south and then up the spur – lesson number two. After leaving 58 and 50 minutes in, we have to decide left or right. Throwing caution to the wind, the initial plan was discarded as we turned right towards 38. Steep yards down into that one and then back out again and lesson number three – pay more attention to just how close together those little lines really are.



*Another team considering their options*

37 was next and we kept well away from the steepness of 46 & 47, following the spur down to accurately grab 70 and easily collected 48 before heading to 59. Fairly heavy going in and out of this one as we followed the gully down and with no result at the cliff face, looked closer at the map and realised it must be further south – lesson four, attention to detail before heading off tracks.

After 43 and 44 it was the big call on how to descend to 71. We had listened to the briefing and took some notice of the advice – we did go a little way down the spur before heading south and steeply into the head of the creek. This we followed along and were pleased to nail 71. We followed a bearing cross country towards 51 whilst another team in the area followed the creek. We both ended up overshooting the mark to the south west but there is nothing like a big barking dog (not on a lead) to let you know you are off course. A sharp bend at the end of the river gave us a fair idea where we were and we soon located 51. Lesson five was even when you are not sure where you are, distinctive landmarks can help.



Our intention was to head to Tea & Damper but as darkness fell we were trudging up the hill and missed the track on the right – lesson six is put your lights on earlier rather than later. When we finally did turn the [Ay Up](#) lights on, a check on the compass indicated we were heading north-east and steep. This looked like just above 60 on the map so we turned around and followed the spur to that target. From there we took the steep track down to Tea & Damper and messed around getting there with houses, music, a 21<sup>st</sup> party and several extra tracks throwing us off for a while.

After 6 hours 45 minutes, it was time for a welcome half hour break, sit down, refuel, deploy a few bandaids, and reassess our goals. Pepped up we headed out towards 52 but took an early right and deciding we were lost and going towards private property, turned south until we eventually picked up a track and suddenly it was 8 pm when we finally hit the intersection near our target. Unsure of how our progress would fair on the run in, and a bit shaken by how easily we were getting lost in the dark, we ditched 52 and the thought of 72. Lesson seven – refer to the compass regularly at night to ensure your heading and use your watch to assist estimate distance – easier than constantly counting steps!

We then headed straight up the hill to pickup 65 and onto 61. Leaving this spot, we debated returning the way we had come in and following the unsealed road or taking the track south and then east. We went for the latter and whilst we were rewarded with some great night views and a shorter trip, I would be curious to know if the more seasoned Rogainers would have chosen the safer option?



From there it was onto 34 and decision time again – with 3 hours to go our tired bodies opted for the more direct north east path home. We were so pleased with the accuracy of our navigation to hit 73 we then went looking for 35, for a short time, at the wrong intersection – hardly a lesson we haven't learnt before - don't get too cocky with one's new found abilities.

After securing 35 we moved on to 64 and thought it was a great location in the dark as you had to descend some distance before scrambling up to the knoll but could not see any of this from the road.



We moved on to get 32 but here we really stumbled. We had an hour and a half to go but blew 45 minutes here and still did not find it. We initially went in off a bearing and then wandered around aimlessly until we learnt that lesson as well and headed back out to try again. Another bearing from a different spot and still no success. We were not the only ones struggling here and one guy said he had “triangulated” the location and was also at a loss – we made a mental note to look that one up, or at least attend the next [training weekend](#) on 12/13 September at Rydal.

Anyway, tired, sore, hungry, and busting to go to the loo, we skipped 22 and 21 and grabbed 20 before clocking off 20 minutes early and making a rush for a Portalo – damn nice to get Sorbent 3 ply in such a structure at that time of night!

We took in some great views, grass trees, bush orchids, moss, lichen, wallabies, spiders with glowing eyes, and a possum. The Tea & Damper was a welcome oasis, and the hash house with a three course hot meal at midnight and shivering staff were greatly appreciated. We were impressed with the event management, level of organisation, infrastructure and what I assume was a passive transponder scoring system. All very professional, well done, and these two novices not only had a good workout and learnt a lot, but will also definitely return with friends and the other members of our team.

