

Our rogaining adventure began the same as a lot of people travelling to the Australian Champs, on a bus from Adelaide up north to the Flinders Ranges. It was a long bus ride in which we got to talk to other competitors and take in the sights. After about 6 hours on the road we arrived (at dusk) at the edge of the Flinders Ranges. The mountains, glowing red in the sun set, made the whole bus fall silent. You could really feel the nervous energy of the bus ride as we were greeted with what seemed like endless watercourses, ridges, spurs and knolls (which all looked the same!) and everyone started to realise the undulating and perhaps navigationally difficult event they were in for.

The next morning when the maps were handed out it was exactly as we had suspected – steep, riddled with watercourses and gullies and covering a very large area. As Andrew and I had never done a rogaine in the Flinders Ranges before (in fact it was Andrew's first 24 hr event) we were not sure what to expect, especially on the 1:33 333 map, which neither of us had ever used before. In the end we decided to head down to the south-east section of the map first, which appeared to be less steep than the northern part and not too difficult navigation wise, and then try and do a loop around the map (in a clockwise direction).

The first six hours of the course passed without any major issues, we even managed to catch a glimpse of an emu watching down from the top of a hill. We found, however, that we were a little behind where we thought we would be at certain time check points (i.e. 3 hours and 6 hours). I think we just didn't realise how far it was between each control as we were so used to 1:25 000 maps! We also made the mistake of contouring/climbing up and over instead of taking the watercourse option as a route choice which slowed us down. We did finally learn, however, that contouring doesn't work because of the steepness of the hills and the unstable footing (due to the shale) and that even what looks like a small hill on the map is indeed a very decent climb. The dry watercourses, however, were amazing; filled with old (and very large) river red gums and lined with steep rock gorges. Some were so wide they were like bush highways and usually easier to walk along than the hillsides.

As night fell we were excited about the prospect of navigating under the full (super) moon light. It was an awesome place to walk at night in such lovely conditions. The moonlight was so bright that the landforms were still quite easy to see and we barely even needed our torches. We reached water drop 5 at about 7 pm and it was at this point I decided to take off my shoes and work out why my feet were starting to become painful. I found, to my disappointment, that huge blisters had already formed on the back of my heels even though I had strapped them. There was nothing I could do so I just applied more strapping and we were underway again. As we continued to walk, however my feet became more and more painful and just two controls later we had to modify our route so we could have a much needed stop at the Hash House.

We had two hours of sleep at the Hash House and were underway again at 5 am. The stop had actually helped my feet more than I had expected and I managed to get a few more hours out of them in the light of the second day. We used this time to do a small loop to the north of the Hash House in a very steep area of the map. It was pleasant none-the-less and we saw another small group of emus (along with a lot of kangaroos). Although as the morning went on my feet started to become painful once again and eventually we just had to hobble back to the main road on the map and walk slowly back to the HH, finishing with plenty of time to spare. Overall we had a really great time and are thankful to the organisers who must have spent countless hours in planning and setting for a rogaine which would have been a logistical nightmare. It is really an amazing area and was well worth the trip. We want to extend special congratulations to the winning teams, especially to the first University team from the ACT, who actually placed second overall. We have learned a lot of valuable lessons (most importantly – what shoes *not* to wear) and are looking forward to the next event. Also a special thanks to the NSW Rogaining Association and the Nigel Aylott Memorial Sports Foundation (NAMSF) for giving us this opportunity.

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