

INTERVIEW WITH THE WINNING TEAM

Trevor Gollan put a few questions to **David Williams** and **Ronnie Taib** after their big effort winning the 12-hour at Tarlo River Gorge

[TG] Congratulations both of you. I didn't think anyone would get all the controls - until maybe when the top 6-hour team got 1800 points and David Baldwin reckoned it was possible to do it all in 12

[DW] Thanks again to you and your team for setting a great course! The first I heard of Tarlo River NP was when I was looking for new places for the 2014 NSW Champs. I wrote it off because of the access issues, so I'm impressed you managed to get in at all

[TG] It wasn't easy... after losing access from the north we rapidly rearranged the course from north-south to a west-east orientation, filled in the mesh of controls in the west and abandoned most of the tapes in the north. How did you plan your route and did you always expect you'd get the lot?

[DW] No, we didn't expect to bag the lot. It wasn't until we got back to about CP45 that we thought it was highly possible. In fact, we were about 20-25 mins behind schedule at about 8pm, and thought we might have to start dropping controls

Initially we got drawn to the two 200s because of the novelty factor, but there was no easy way to link them with the 70/80/100 in the SE. After checking some distances though, and seeing that scores near the HH were dense but low, we planned to get all CPs in the E with 53 and maybe 83 as optional

The high density of similar value CPs, along with the complex relief, made things a bit confusing in the western half. We just tried to



connect them as efficiently as we could to avoid climbing while taking into account your notes on Cow Horn and Kerrawary Cks, and that the spurs/ridges were open

We planned to get back at 23:10, giving a nice 50 minute buffer with CPs 33/43/22 as options at the end. Otherwise, if we were running late, we could drop say 44/45 and hightail it home via 43

[RT] I enjoyed that planning the course wasn't obvious, as I don't like when there are only "predefined" loops where you keep bumping into people. Your points, especially closer to the HH were scattered in such a way that several strategies were possible, and gave us some interesting preparation

In terms of course length, I concur with Dave that you struck the perfect length, at least for us. We didn't think we could clear it until the very end which made it quite interesting and exciting. Should the top Australian teams have been around, you could have thrown in a couple more remote controls. But I'm happy you didn't do it :)

We had a bit of a laugh about the 200 pointers initially, but I guess it was a good idea to lure people over there

Again, thanks for setting that course. I realise the amount of effort it would have taken you

and the team to set/vet/hang/collect. Hats off! And it gave us a unique opportunity to visit this superb park.

[TG] Do you know what distance you travelled? I reckoned nearly 50km to do the lot, but the terrain and lack of tracks would make the going harder

[DW] Our initial estimate from planning was about 41.5km but didn't include CPs 53/33/43/22. Add those in and we would have done about 45km

[TG] My estimate would have included the 100-pointer in the north-east that we abandoned as being unnecessary and unpleasant

What were your highlights - such as scenery, navigational highs, achievements?

[DW] For scenery - the swimming hole and cascade at CP100, Kerrawary Ck between CP72 and CP62, Tarlo River between CP34 and CP53, and the narrow spurs with good views, especially east of CP34, east of CP73, east of CP81 and then up towards 204

We really liked the ridge from CP80 all the way down to CP81. There was a great kangaroo-goat track all the way down, and they were even smart enough to go around the knolls!

[TG] Given you visited the entire course you've seen most of our highlights too. That ridge was a favourite of mine, walking from CP81 to CP80 in sunset light, then great views at the top. Someone commented on the unusual number of open ridges that didn't have fire trails

[DW] We didn't find the navigation too difficult as the country is fairly well defined

(compare to ACTRA champs a month ago!), open, and the contours quite good. We made a few minor errors that cost us five minutes or so but no major stuff ups

We were very pleased to clear the course - quite unexpected! And to have clean night navigation

[TG] Conversely, what were the bad bits and dangers?

[DW] No real dangers that we encountered. Ronnie managed to cut his finger on the scree slope down to CP100 that required some first aid, but I think we had been warned about this at the briefing. Blackthorn and blackberry in some of the gullies but not much. When we did find some, it could generally be avoided by punching 10-20m up and onto a clear spur. The pigs and pig damage were a negative

[TG] Yes, pig digging by the creeks is especially discouraging

How did you do that leg from CP82 to CP73? I explored that knoll on the horseshoe bend between those controls and decided it was too dangerous

[DW] From 82 we went down the spur to the SW, crossed the Tarlo and then up the gully and spur to the end of the ridge that extends NW from 101. We dropped packs from there and went out and back to 73. Did the same for 83 from the saddle above 84



[TG] Did you see any other interesting animals, plants or geography?

[DW] Not a lot. We did hear a glider and a powerful owl, and someone pointed another owl out but I couldn't identify it. We

triggered an animal camera at the end of the trail out to CP72 in case NPWS wonder what strange glowing animal stumbled past at about 9pm

[TG] The 200-pointers were previously 100-pointers but Mike, as vetter, figured they were inadequate reward for effort and people wouldn't go out there. 200 points seemed to draw the top teams, though you two would have to go there regardless if you were aiming for the lot. As experienced course setters, what do you think of our approach?

[DW] I thought it was a good solution. We didn't initially think we would clear, so it wasn't immediately obvious whether the high score/low density option in the NE was better than the lower scores/higher densities in the SE. Interestingly, I think the high density of low scoring CPs in the western half of the course (mostly 40s, 50s, 60s) made the decision to cleanup the eastern half of the course easier, since it offered more options if we were running late or early, and there was low risk of missing any big scoring controls

[TG] Should a course be too big for anyone to get them all?

[DW] Not necessarily. It should be big enough to avoid certainty, so that it doesn't just become a foot race (i.e. an ultramarathon!) For a 12-hour, I thought the size was perfect. We weren't sure we'd clear it and get back on time until inside the last hour, and even then there was no margin for error. Given that the 2nd team was only 160pts behind but 20 minutes early, I suspect we won more on strategy, time management, and precision of nav, rather than pure speed. We jogged down a few easy hills, but otherwise very little

I think the current ARA technical standard is fine: "The course shall be so designed that finishing the course by visiting every

checkpoint is unlikely, but that the winning team is likely to visit a significant majority of the checkpoints"

For most of this event, I thought it was unlikely that we would clear it. If the course has to be so big that it ensures even World Rogaining champs can't clear, then it makes setting/vetting/hanging/collecting too much effort to encourage new volunteers

I also note that the NPWS Orienteering & Rogaining policy stipulates two weeks either side of the event for placing and collecting markers on the course, unless a prior extension has been requested/permited. That's certainly not enough time to set, vet, hang & collect for a 24hr event

[TG] Interesting point. Good luck with the NSW Champs this year. I hope your course setting is going well and simpler than I experiences with Tarlo. And thanks for this chat
