

# A bush BASH

If you go down to the bush sometime, you may be in for a big surprise. WILLIAM VERITY discovers the cult sport of rogaining.

**"I HOPE THEY WARNED YOU about him."**

She's the second person in five minutes to deliver the same warning and then melt into the crowd chuckling lightly to themselves.

It's too late to pull out now anyway, just a short time before the whistle goes to mark the start to the 46th Paddy Pallin Rogaine at Coolendel, a bush property 20km west of Nowra.

My partner for the next six hours of bashing through bush with a map and a compass is Mike Hotchkis, a nuclear physicist from Helensburgh and twice Australian champion of this cult sport.

He used to make maps of imaginary places when he was a child and hike around the Scottish Highlands as a teenager at night for a lark.

I sense trouble ahead.

We have studied the map given to us two hours before, and worked out our route climbing up hills, around spurs, through gullies and up cliff passes to check points, each offering points from 10 to 100 depending on their difficulty.

And then there's the river crossing. Hotchkis is nothing if not wily, beckoning me to the edge of 600 rogainers of all ages and fitness levels, so when the event begins, we can jog at a fast pace to the Shoalhaven River.

Here, I had naively assumed, we would remove our walking boots and socks before we stepped into the freezing rapids.

"Oh, I wouldn't bother with that," Hotchkis said as he blithely stepped

in, boots and all. "I don't worry about a bit of wet."

Not wishing to seem a wimp, I followed him over to the other side before we headed up a steep, wooded and trackless slope to a height of 200m.

"I suppose," I said, breathing heavily at the top, "That it's mostly about fitness, this sport."

"No," replied Hotchkis. 10 years my senior and not yet broken into a sweat, "I find now that I'm older that I don't have the speed for the six-hour events. I'm much better at the 24-hour rogaines."

The thought of 24-hours full-pelt through thick bush is beyond comprehension at that stage.

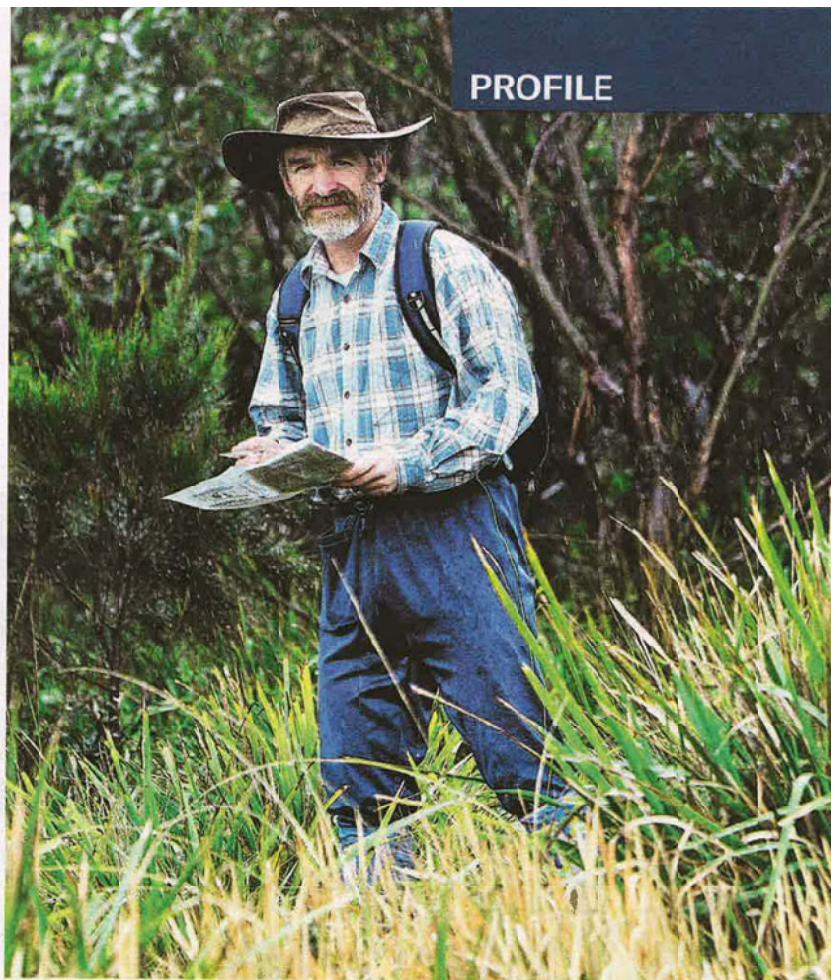
Rogaining is a proud Australian sport - with strong Wollongong connections - that is a cross between bushwalking and orienteering.

Its roots lie in the first 24-hour walk held at Melbourne University in 1947, followed by a similar event at Adelaide University in 1963.

A public 24-hour walk was organised in 1972 and the inaugural rogaine proper, was held in 1976, organised by Roger, Gail and Neil Phillips (hence the name, derived from their first names).

The only navigation aids permitted are a compass, a watch and a map.

It's only once we're up the hill that Hotchkis admits he's a little out of practice and indeed, our initial plan of covering most of the course in six hours quickly looks unrealistic as we



Mike Hotchkis, a nuclear physicist from Helensburgh, spends much of his leisure time rogaining.  
Picture: ANDY ZAKELI

bash blindly through the scrub, looking for a red and white marker that doesn't seem to exist.

"Can you feel victory slipping from our grasp?" I say to my partner. "Because I can."

Quite how far victory always has been from our grasp is made abundantly clear at the end of the exhausting day, when Trevor Gollan - a Mt Keira resident known to some as "Mr Rogaining" - and the NSW organiser of the sport, gives the results.

The open category winner has scored more than 1600 points in the six-hour event, compared to our creditable but unremarkable 980 points.

Gollan is a veteran bushwalker who competed in one of the first NSW rogaining events, held in 1983 around

fitness, stamina, competitiveness and appreciation of the natural environment."

It's a democratic sport, too, competitive if you want it to be but simply an excuse to get out into the bush with the family for a day if you want.

"One of the appeals of the sport is that it is encompassing," Gollan said. "The marathon runners are on the same course as a three-year-old child."

Gollan is probably the true hero of the day, along with the Watara scout group who cater superbly for 600 hungry walkers with roganjosh (or "rogaine josh" as one wag puts it), steaming pumpkin soup, sausage sandwiches and cups of tea.

He is the volunteer organiser for the event, which means co-ordinating half a dozen course setters - the people who set control points and the points-value attached to them - as well as printing the maps, organising first aid registration, catering and more.

"Rogaining attracts people who are comfortable in the bush, that's the biggest thing," Gollan said.

"They don't mind sitting down on a rock and having a spider crawl over them."

"If you asked a lot of people on the street to wander around in the bush after dark, they would be scared out of their wits."

"Rogainers are willing to explore new country and they are relatively social as we ask them to take part in a team. They have a tolerance for other people because things can get pretty stressful."

Heading back to the suburbs on a Sunday night with red dust covering the car, it was hard to imagine a better way to spend a weekend. ■



**The marathon runners are on the same course as a three-year-old child.**

Wingello in the Southern Highlands, and has helped organise at least one event a year since 1989.

He and Hotchkis together set the course for the 1986 World Championships held in the Warumbungles in northern NSW.

"Rogaining offers every kind of challenge," Gollan said. "It takes planning, teamwork, navigation,



Mt Keira's Trevor Gollan is the NSW organiser of the sport of rogaining.  
Picture: DAVE TEASE