

GEOQUEST 09

A DNF is a rare occurrence for the Cowgirls or Aunties at any time – in fact, this was a first... - and it was the hardest decision for Aunty Jan to make the call to pull the pin on the race at the 40 hour mark... but when safety is the issue and the situation was never going to improve, this is what she had to do.

Other than this low point, the event (we did get 40hrs for our money...) was absolutely amazing... (Well maybe not the raft paddle...!!) We started the event in the crisp, mountain air at Barrington Tops – the Cowgirls were excited – and with our superb efforts in the '5-legged race' we were seeded high up the field for the start....

We started off riding (good activity for Cowgirls...) and we thoroughly enjoyed the descent on beautiful mountain trails with Aunty Kim at the helm doing the Nav.... Finding our way to the rogaine, we set off on foot to find the 4 CP's with not much fuss and it was back on the bikes for a further ride that took us up (Aunty Kim was busy towing at this point) and then down one of the most spectacular rides we have ever done in any event. A most amazing valley unfolded before us and we rode a winding single track down to the road with yelps of joy!! Woohoo! – what a ride!!!! This is definitely why we do this sport!!

At Rocky Crossing we were met by our support crew for a car trip back to HQ where we barely had time to drop our Mtb's (washed in the river..) and gear and get back to organise our sunset paddle through Wallis Lake and then up the Wang Wauk River back to where we left the bikes. The paddle was peaceful but long (although Aunty Jan was powering along...) and by the time we reached the bikes we were very happy to change disciplines.

This next leg was an Adventuregaine that would take us well into the next day. We had to collect 11 CP's – some on bike and some on foot. We chose the 7 on bike and 4 on foot option and worked our way through the forests near Bulahdelah on the old Hwy rather than taking the shorter, more tricky route. We were happy with our choice, but were tiring as the night went on. Finally arriving at the TA at Bulahdelah, we left our bikes and continued on foot as the sun was rising... but the day was cloudy and soon it was raining. We headed up the 'proud' cliffs overlooking the town and our climbing gun, Narelle, sped up the rock face in record time. We were moving a bit slowly after this as Aunty Jan's knees weren't happy with running too much..... even though she was firmly attached to the tow-line...We nailed the CP's on the trek with no trouble and along the way met up with some other teams (Team Red with the lovely Jase and some Geo half punters) on our way down the hill... so a good time for a bit of a chat!

After a nice sleep for them – we made the wake up call for our support crew to pick up our gear and meet us at the raft launch....We arrived and got into some food before putting our engineering heads together (not...) to construct our craft. This is what Craig (race organiser) says we will remember most about our race – well, he was right, because it was one of the most horrible

experiences of our lives, I think! Four of us sitting on eight tyres and four bits of wood, three paddling, and one being a back rest for the person in front.... This is not what Cowgirls do best – and we were suffering big time. Initially we thought we would tip out, then we thought we were hardly moving, but eventually we were passing other rafts moving slower than us (didn't think this was possible!...) We made it to the portage where we were swift getting through the tracks, but made a monumental error on changing the configuration of the raft for the next paddle (the long bit...!)

Aunty Jan was in front position with legs spread eagle, no backrest and abs working overtime just to stay on top of the stupid thing....trying to paddle was another task in itself!! ... seriously, this was as close to the pain of child-birth as Aunty Jan could remember.....That special breathing was coming in handy at this time...We were heading to a point on an island that wasn't coming quick enough – we were willing it to move to us....and finally we got there and changed positions.... This was not much better, but we made it after digging very deep within ourselves for the final few 100 metres...Making it to that shoreline was one of the happiest moments for all of us!!!

Our lovely crew were waiting to pamper us and send us off on a paddle that would take us into the 2nd night....We had a lovely paddle to the boat-ramp where we were to portage quite a distance (about 2kms...) We had some wheels on board and the ingenious Cowgirls devised a way we could carry both boats (the fab Fenn XT doubles..) on this one trolley... It was a very difficult exercise even with the trolley, but we managed by changing positions every time we were tiring. The lakes were pristine and we could see the bottom as we glided over them with the (almost) full moon rising over the distant dunes....It was truly beautiful, and besides a little mis-navigating where Wendy and Aunty Jan got stuck on some old wharf timbers just under the surface, we really enjoyed this part of the event.... Our next stop was Frothy Coffee on Smiths Lake (unfortunately it was closed, so no coffee ☹) where we would meet our Crew again and go off on foot for a wade in the lake over to Sandbar before a long trek that would take us to the final paddle... well, that was the plan.

We made a very bad decision at this TA to stay in our wet gear (thinking we would warm up running...what were we thinking????) and paid the price a few hours later when we were lost on the trek and subsequently had to pull out of the event. The clear water of Smith's Lake was quite fascinating though and we saw the most amazing octopus (bigger than a dinner plate!) just as we were about to enter it for our wade....Yes, we are sure this was not a hallucination!!! Positive!! Anyway, other teams who opted to get out of their wet gear – even on the other side of the lake, were much better off but we plodded on looking for that non-existent track and were getting colder and colder. We had met up with other teams here – all equally confused, and no-one was capable of making a firm decision on what we should do (or which way we should go....!!) Narelle did make a decision (during all this indecisiveness...) to change out of her wetsuit, but, alas, it was too late for her as we were to find out soon after. Then Aunty Jan & Kim made the same change and were much happier and warmer instantly. Wendy was still in her

wetsuit, and unfortunately did not have any more dry gear....so she suffered in silence while we were walking around in circles.... We finally decided (with team Tasty Wibbles) to take the route to the main road (which was out of bounds... and that pretty much sealed our decision to pull the pin).. The Wibbles were a great team to be around and big Gav was like a heater for Narelle when we were in the huddle trying to raise her body temperature. The lovely Seany H was lying on the ground eating my chips and Auntie Kim was on duty on the side of the road trying to flag down the crews as they came to the rescue... It was a funny little situation!!! Anyway, once in the car we had the heaters blazing....it was like a sauna and I think Wendy nearly passed out from hyperthermia (too hot!!)....We made it back to the luxury accommodation of our crew and Wendy tucked Narelle into bed while the Aunties went about cooking hot chips and pouring the champagne – We Aunties say there's never a moment not appropriate for the celebratory bubbles – finish line or no finish line. I must make mention here that our crew then had to go back out into the night to retrieve our paddle gear & boats that were waiting for us at CP 19.....not a nice task when your racers are back home sipping the champers. We thank you Jude and Ian for your wonderful support and scrumptious food....this was not possible without you both!!

So that was it – Geoquest 09 in a nutshell..... 40 hours in but we didn't make the finish line.... You could say we were disappointed, however, pleased with our efforts and happy with our sensible decision to go with the safety of the Cowgirls and not wait until it was too late..... Yee-ha!