

1020 Adventure Race, 1-2 December 2006

We arrived in Mangawhai on the evening of Friday the 1st December in time for gear check and briefing for the 2nd 1020 Challenge Adventure race. Racing with Brent, Anna and Wayne Hodgetts (Wayne Oxenham was out of action after surgery on his heel) as Orion 1, our closest competition was likely to be from the Orion 2 Team, Ross Rotherham, Alysha Blackwell, Gus Grey and Mike Clay. Also in the mix was the "Hidden Talents" team of Neil Kerrison, Phil Wood, Tim Cochrane and Fiona McBryde.

Pre-printed maps were handed out before briefing so that we had a chance to go over the course and come up with any questions for the race organisers. Some planning would have to wait until the morning though as the first stage would be a 3 hour Kayak rogaine and we would not receive the maps for this until half an hour before the start.

As luck had it we were staying only about 5 minutes drive from the start on the Kaipara Harbour so we headed there after briefing to finish organising gear and looked forward to not having to get up too ridiculously early the next morning. Pre-race disaster almost struck when Wayne discovered that it not such a good idea to inflate your mattress with a hair dryer. Neither Brent or I were keen on sharing ours but luckily a spare was found and we could look forward to a comfortable sleep.

A perfect Northland day greeted us as we gathered to the start and received the rogaine maps. It was quickly apparent that getting all the rogaine controls would not be possible without a motor or a Fouhy so we drew up a roughly 30km route that would net us a good number of controls with a few options near the end for short-cutting if we were running out of time.

The Rogaine format was a great way to make the paddle more interesting and had teams heading off in every direction in search of sea caves, creeks, mangroves and other locations where controls were located. Our plan ended up a little over-ambitious after some early delays and in the end we had to skip a few easy controls so that we could make it back under the three hours and so escape hefty time penalties. Even so we managed more than the other teams so we had a 5 minute credit over Hidden Talents and 10 minutes over Orion 2 when the race re-started on the Mountain bikes.

A key feature of this race was that even when the navigation was easy such as when biking on gravel roads, there were still tricky route choice decisions to be made. The first mountain bike leg was a good example of this where the three leading teams all took different routes. More by luck than good management our chosen route seemed to be the fastest and we opened up a 15 minute lead by

the time we made it to the mystery activity area. A welcome diversion from slogging our guts out we had some fun completing the various challenges (raw egg anyone?) before getting back on the bikes to take us to the 1st trekking stage in the Ruakaka forest.

The trekking in the Ruakaka's was a great test of navigation. A fantastically open forest where we followed streams, animal and hunters tracks, or just the compass to find each checkpoint. Rushing a bit we overshot one checkpoint and lost a little time back-tracking but by the end of the trek we still had a good gap over the chasing teams as we returned by bike to our support crews at the Mystery activity area.

Another highlight of the race saw us crawling and sliding for about half an hour through a cave system, briefly stopping to admire the limestone formations before heading back out into the sun-shine.

Once again we slipped up on navigation, rushing into the next stage and missing the first checkpoint in the river trek. Unable to determine where exactly where we were, we decided to bash up about 80m to the road and relocate before returning to the river. 20 minutes lost we finally found the checkpoint, exactly where it should be but easily missed if you were not paying attention. Despite the error we were still a way in front of Orion 2 and Hidden Talents where the battle for 2nd was heating up.

Paying more attention to the map now we completed the river trek without further problems and set off for Waipu cove first on Mountain bikes and then in kayaks as the sun set behind us.

The penultimate stage before the final 5km beach run was a lengthy mountain bike ride through forestry on the North side of the Brynderwyns. With no set order for the checkpoints, route choice again came into play and we decided to climb on forestry roads first which would take us to the highest point of the ride and leave us with a single-track down hill and a short sharp bike push to get us back to the road again. All was going well until the free-wheel on Wayne's bike decided to stop free-wheeling just before the technical downhill section. Unable to free it up with water I got the job of nursing it down the hill while Wayne had the pleasure of riding my new Giant Anthem – the sacrifices we make for the team!!

Back on the road again we finished the bike stage without further incident and with the best part of an hour's lead over the next team we could jog down the beach to finish to waiting support crew and pizza.

The fight for 2nd went right to the wire. Orion 2 came in first but Hidden Talents had a 7 minute credit over them from the kayak rogaine and the mystery activities. Hidden Talents knew they had a chance and were practically sprinting down the beach at the finish but were not quite close enough at 11 minutes behind, missing out on 2nd by 4 minutes.

Another 1-2 for Orion and one of the best 24 hour races I've ever done. Rob and the rest of the 1020 team did a fantastic job of making a challenging and fun race, putting navigation and decision making back into the mix and not simply having a team multisport race. Looking forward to the next instalment of the 1020