

# 2011 Adventure Racing World Championships

Race report by Mark Lattanzi of Team 57: The Dancing Pandas

Burnie, Tasmania, Australia  
2-11 November 2011

## Team Dancing Pandas

Masha Glanville (San Diego, CA, USA) - captain

Thorlene (pronounced Tor) Egerton (Melbourne, AUS) - navigator

Peter Jolles (Atlanta, GA USA) - navigator

Mark Lattanzi (Blacksburg, VA USA) - navigator



Once again, I went off to a 10 day adventure race in a faraway place. This time, it was the 2011 Australia XPD World Championships in Tasmania.

We put together a great team for this one - a great, highly motivated and super organized captain and three navigators. The four of us had not raced together before

as a team but we all knew a little bit about each other from previous races. All of us have done many expedition races in the past including the Australia XPD in previous years (Thor 3 times, Mark 2 times, and Masha once). We had high hopes.

### **31 October 2011 - Arrival And Check-in**

We all met in Burnie a few days before the race and did the required gear checks and trips to the grocery store to buy a mountain of food. Peter and I alone spent over \$400 on our food. Masha and Thor mostly brought their own from home. We stuffed the food in small ziplocs and then into larger "12 hour" bags. Those went into one of our 5 gear boxes that would be distributed about the course. Also, into each gear box went the various pieces of gear and clothing that we would need (or thought we would need) to complete the race - perhaps not in comfort, but in relative safety. Mostly, that meant extra dry socks, a dry fleece or thermal shirt, or even an extra set of dry gloves. We also had to figure out where to put extra pairs of trekking shoes, trekking poles, and other equipment that we would need throughout the race.



### **1 November 2011 - Maps and Gear Drop Off**

Once the bins were packed and weighed (no bin could weigh more than 25 kilos), we dropped them all off at HQ along with our paddle bag (chock full of PFDs, paddles, and paddling gear), and our 4 bike boxes. During the race, we would be assembling our bikes before every ride, and disassembling them for transport afterward.

Unfortunately, some of the boxes were a bit overweight so we had to remove some food and such to get them all under the weight limit. We knew we would regret this later, but it had to be done.

Logistically, it's quite a problem to pack the gear bins correctly - looking at the course overview and figuring out what to put where. We did our best, dropped off all the gear and then proceeded to examine the course maps in greater detail for the rest of the evening. The race would start the next morning (November 2nd) with a 17 km ocean paddle.

The entire course laid out as follows.

Stage	Discipline	Dist. (km)	Ave. Time (hrs)	Checkpoints
1	Ocean Kayak	17	3.5	1, 2
2	Trek (w/ Shooting)	20	7	3 - 8
3	Mountain Bike	20	1.5	9
4	Caving	0.5	1	7 checkpoints in cave
5	Mountain Bike	50	4.5	10 - 12
6	Trek/Abseil/Canyon	60	23	13 - 19
7	Kayak/Raft	12	4	20
8	Lake Kayak	20	6	21, 22
9	Mountain Bike	105	12.5	23 - 29
	Mid Camp	0	6	Compulsory Stop
10	Coastal Trek	65	24	30 - 36
11	Mountain Bike	150	19	37 - 41
12	Kayak/Trek	75 km kayak 12 km trek	22 +11 hour dark zone	42 - 45
13	Mountain Bike	70	7	46, 47
14	Coasteering	25	6	48 - 52
15	Mountain Bike	35	3	53
<b>Total</b>		<b>700</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>61</b>

## 2 November 2011 - Race Start!

The race began at 9:00 am on the Burnie beach. 160 kayaks all lined up on the beach with 320 racers all decked out in paddling gear lined up behind them. The Sports Minister of Tasmania sounded the starting horn and we all ran to our boats and set off into the ocean.

Expedition adventure races are a bit of a blur to the participants. It seems like only one long "day" happens, despite the fact that the sun goes up and down many times. The race becomes a series of exercising, eating, cat napping, transitioning, and pushing yourself farther than you thought possible.

So for this race report, I'd thought I'd try to focus on the actual nights of the race.



### **The First Night - 2 Hours of Sleep**

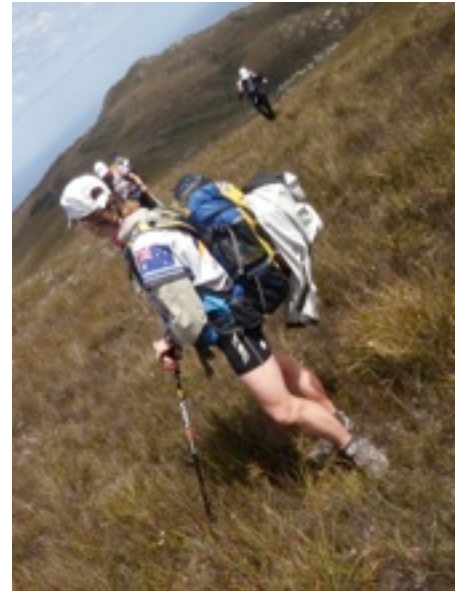
We didn't plan on sleeping on the first night. We've always made it through to the second day before sleeping for the first time. But day one was a bit strenuous. It started with the 17km windy ocean paddle where Peter and Masha in the sit-on-top kayak towed me and Thor (in the gear laden inflatable Sevlor) for the last kilometer just to get us to make headway in the wind. and then the trek inland which included a checkpoint where one of us (Yay Peter!) had to shoot at 5 clay pigeons and hit at least one, and then a 70 km bike leg split up by a one hour caving adventure, we were spent. We finished the bike leg around 1am and decided it was time for sleep #1 (about 2 hours) before setting out on the first big trek. Of course, after 90 minutes, Thor (who

can never seem to get to sleep) woke us all up and said it was time to go. Off we went in the wee hours of the morning on the "easier" 60 km trek.

### **The Second Night - Who needs sleep?**

The easier trek quickly left the paved road and headed into the bush where we entered a steep sided canyon. We lost the track a few times but eventually made it to the next checkpoint along the river. We were in the thick of things with a few teams both ahead of us and behind us. Apparently, sleeping on the first night was a popular option.

We left the canyon and climbed up to the highest point on the course - Black Bluff. We quickly found that point and then trekked across some highlands to the next couple of CPs. We exited the bush right next to Team Spirit Canada and the 8 of us shuffled down the road for 4 km together before finding another track back into the bush. Along the way, we passed a friendly wombat, so we stopped to take a few pictures.



As darkness fell, we followed an ever smaller track down to Reynolds Falls and the abseil. We lost the track again and spent an hour relocating it. It was flagged but the bush was waist high in spots and it was easy to lose. We arrived at the top of the falls at midnight to learn that the abseil had been canceled because there was too much water coming over the falls.

We spent 20 minutes by the CP fire and then forged ahead - 150m down a slippery slope to the base of the falls and the canyon containing the Vale river.

We were told that the top of the canyon would be slow-going and would require a few swims in large pools. At 1am in the morning, the idea didn't excite us. We reached the first pool and planned our attack- food, fleeces, and such into a dry bag and leave our tights and shoes on. We jumped in. And away we went. Thor managed to put her entire pack into a dry bag and inflate it with enough air that she used it as a big float. The rest of us swam the two upper pools. The first one was about 25m across. The second was over 40m across. We reached the far side shivering and quickly put on dry clothes and hats.

We slowly made our way down the 15 km of river, crossing it many times to find flat places to trek. Trekking in the river proved to be a slippery, slow option that we tried to avoid at all costs. We finally reached the bottom of the river where it entered MacIntosh Lake around dawn. The CP was plotted on river right so we had to cross the river one last time. We found a good spot, crossed and trekked another 500m.

"There's the checkpoint!" shouted Thor. "And look, it's on river left!"  
"Shit."

One more river crossing and we were finally there. It was 7:00 am. No sleep at all on the second night. The "easy" trek had taken us over 24 hours. In the canyon, we passed a few teams and were now in the low 30s. We had passed "It's All Good" and "Unleashed Compression" in the canyon. Nga Rakau (a New Zealand team) was waiting at the transition area for their paddles. We chatted a bit and decided to do the short lake paddle before sleeping.

### **The Third Night - Two short sleeps (3 hours total)**

As we had three navigators, we were taking turns navigating. I was up next for the 14 km lake paddle. We were only given one Sevlor kayak so we all had to pile into it. It took us 3 stops to finally get situated but we managed to find a configuration where we could all paddle somewhat effectively.

It was already past 9am but we were finally making good time. Unfortunately, sleep overcame us as the sun came out so we decided to sleep on a small beach for an hour.

All of the early stops and the sleep (and lack thereof) confused me about our progress, so once we awoke, we zoomed down the lake - 4 km past the checkpoint before we collectively figured it out. Oops- my mistake - a 3 hour one. We meekly turned around and paddled back up the lake to the next CP.

Upon arrival, we encountered Mawson - an all-male team of friends of ours. They were heading out in their boats as we pulled in.

Sleep #2 was due so we slept about two hours at this transition, picked up a second boat and headed out for the next paddling leg. It went across two lakes with a 2 km portage in between ending in the small town of Tullah. It went smoothly (Thor was navigating) and we arrived at the next transition area just after dark around 9pm. We pulled in, stowed the boats, ate some hot food (dehydrated meals!), built our bikes, and headed out into the night around 11pm for a 105 km mountain bike ride to Mid-Camp.

The first half of the ride was a lot of muddy tracks and trails and a few forest roads. With some careful navigating, we managed to get through without too much difficulty. One section was particularly confusing and several teams spent a few hours looking for the right path off the mountain. We arrived into the mayhem, but we had been pretty careful about tracking our distance and position. After one false start, we found the right trail and headed down to the town of Roseberry. It was well after midnight and we were exhausted so we found a grassy roadside and laid down for a quick sleep #3 - about 60 minutes I think, but long enough for both Spirit Canada and Mawson to pass us by.



Back on the bikes and the trails, we arrived at Montezuma Falls and a swinging bridge right at dawn on day 4. It was a lovely sight and we paused for 10 minutes to take some pictures.

After that, it was more forest roads and trails. We mostly followed the multitude of bike tracks that came before us and arrived out onto a paved road many hours later.

We hit the town of Zeehan about 10am and opted for a mid-morning cappuccino stop rather than another sleep. Refreshed we pace-lined the last 50 km into mid camp - pausing briefly (about 2 hours) to go get a checkpoint in a maze of unmapped logging roads.



We arrived in great spirits at mid-camp around 2pm. We had a bit of team contest guessing what place we would be in. Thor picked 33rd. Peter picked 32nd. Masha picked 34th. I optimistically chose 31st. Thor won. We arrived to mid-camp in 33rd place out of 80 starting teams.

### **Mid Camp - 3 solid hours of sleep!**

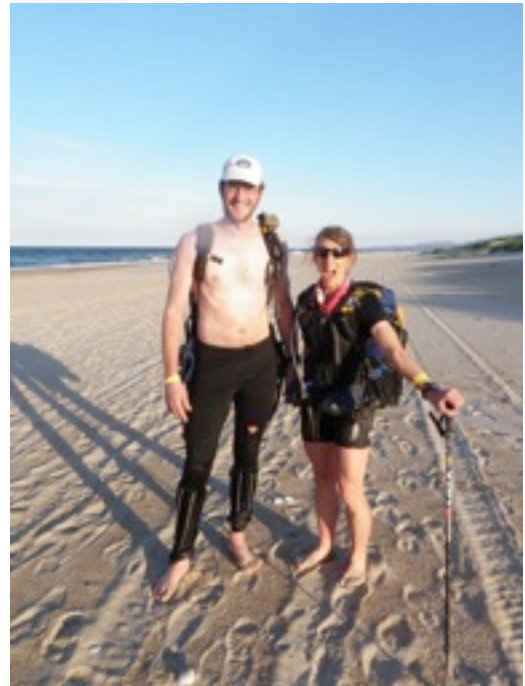
Mid camp is a fun place. Every team gets a big plate of breakfast food (brekky), a nice waterproof canvas tent, and 6 hours to recover a bit before setting out for the second half of the course. There's a fair bit of socializing that happens as well since many teams are within 6 hours of each other and have some overlap time at mid camp. We chatted a bit with Girls On Top, Spirit Canada, Nga Rakau (ahead of us), and with Mawson, It's All Good, and iAdventure (a bit behind us). After brekky and bicycle dismantling, we all crashed out for a solid 3 hours of much needed sleep (sleep #4). Even Thor managed to get a good rest. So far, we had managed about 8 hours of sleep in the first 4 days of the race. We figured on 2-3 hours a night so we were on the low end of our plan.

### **The Fourth Night - We sleep again.**

We left mid camp on the second big trek - 65 km up the beach and across some sand dunes. The beach trek went well. We even ran a bit as the sun set over the ocean. We entered the sand dunes around 11pm. There were two CPs in the dunes and the topo map was useless. We were given a satellite photo to use to aid in finding the points. We got a bit lost but with three navigators, we eventually made it to the first CP. We quickly punched and head for the second one. We got back across the dunes in the general area, but we were all groggy, so rather than wander in the dark, we opted to have another sleep. Sleep #5 was awesome. The ocean and the dunes provided a

warm breeze and we managed another 3 hours of sleep. We were only 5 hours out of mid camp, but we needed the sleep and it didn't make sense to hunt around the dunes in the dark all night. We awoke at dawn to a deep red streaked sunrise sky.

Refreshed (and in the light), we found the second dunes CP in about 15 minutes and continued north out of the dunes and back up the beach. Around 8am, we encountered the Henty River. The tide was in so it was well over our head - and definitely in our way. We stuffed everything into dry bags and swam across - about 50m. At least it was fresh water and the sun was up. We had a glorious hour afterward walking up the beach in our bare feet - drying off.



We reached the Little Henty River and another swim. It's All Good was resting on the near shore pretty beat from a long night in the dunes. We said hello and goodbye, swam the river and trekked into the bush towards CP32. The rest of the trek went well. There was a fair bit of bush whacking and route finding. I navigated the beginning; Thor did the middle; and Peter did the end. It worked beautifully and we made it to all the CPs in the light and trekked into the transition area back on the coast in Granville Harbor around 10:30pm. Unfortunately it was pouring rain.

### **The Fifth Night (Two more hours of sleep)**

We quickly pitched the tent and all crawled in. Sleep #6 was about 2 hours long. I think our tent had shrunk during the last rain storm because there didn't seem to be enough room any more for all four of us.

We awoke, built the bikes and headed out just before dawn for a 150 km mountain bike ride. It started with 10 km up the beach and then turned inland following the Savage River back into the highlands. There was a ferry crossing about halfway where we had to load the bikes onto two Sevlor kayaks and paddle them across the river. There was a cafe on the other side that provided us with some toasties and coffee. The ride ended with quite a surprise -



an 8 km hike-a-bike along a muddy unrideable forest track followed by a 5 km ride up a huge hill out of the river valley. To our surprise, we caught up to Girls On Top on the muddy track. They had broken a derailleur, Peter lent them our universal hanger and we carried on. Then on the big uphill climb, we passed Nga Ragau (wow!) and cycled into the transition area one minute ahead of them in 25th place! We were elated (and tired)! It was after midnight. The bike ride had taken us 20 hours but we had moved up a bit in the standings.



### **The Sixth Night - Sleeping in the dark zone**

We were at the start of the 75 km river paddle stage, but there was a dark zone (no paddling from 7:30pm until 6:30am), so we pitched the tent and got 4 more hours of sleep (sleep #7). Many teams had been caught out by the dark zone, so we were now in the group of teams from 18th to about 35th. The top 17 teams had all left on the paddle earlier in the day and so were virtually uncatchable to us. Teams arriving after 4pm this day would likely have to wait until tomorrow to begin paddling, so would be in the third wave of teams. We were thrilled to be where we were.

We packed up the bikes, grabbed all of our paddling gear and hiked 5 km back to the river. We were on the water by about 10am. We traveled the first bit of the river with Girls On Top and Nga Rakau before they left us behind never to be seen again.

There were 3 CPs on the river - all had to be trekked to. We managed to get to the first two and two thirds of the way down the river before 7:30pm and the dark zone. We were forced to pull off the river and camp until the next morning. We found a beautiful spot where another composite team (7 members from the broken teams of iAdventure, the Argentinians, and one other team) had camped and already had a fire started!

### **The Seventh Night - On The Arthur River**

We had a nice social evening along the Arthur River, dried out a bunch of our wet gear and went to sleep around 11pm. We rose at 5:30am (sleep #8 - 7 hours!) to get ready to get back on the river at 6:30am. This was our last sleep of the race.

Normally, we would have eaten ourselves silly as well, but we somehow managed to not put in much food into the boats before we set off. We only had one dehydrated meal and one pack of noodles. Otherwise, it was all pre-packaged race food. Blech!

We headed out on the river at 6:30am, got the last river CP, and finished the paddle by 10:30am.

There were only 3 more stages: a 70 km bike, a 25 km coastal trek, and a 35 km bike into Burnie. We could almost see the finish line, but we all knew that it has a way of appearing closer than it actually is.

We stowed the paddling gear for the last time (yay!) and built our bikes. The 70 km ride went pretty fast except for one tricky point near the end. We doubled back twice but eventually found the best way through (only 20 extra minutes or so). We got to "The Tavern" at Rocky Cape around 6pm in the pouring rain. We checked in, dumped the bikes, grabbed our trekking shoes and headed out - right into the tavern for a hot burger!

"What? You don't have burgers?! What kind of tavern is this?"

We settled for 5 hot ham and cheese toasties and set off walking down the road. I had severe tendonitis at this point in the front of both of my ankles and was having difficulty walking downhill. Masha was suffering a similar fate. We limped along as best we could, but the next 25 km were excruciating for everyone.

We found the first two checkpoints easily, but the third one required a few kilometers of coasteering on slippery rocks. Thor led us right to it, but it was pretty slow going. The last checkpoint of the trek was a bit tricky. Many teams had some problems with it. We were no exception but Peter managed to find it by walking 20m uphill from the trail for a few hundred meters. The description was 20m S of trail. Brilliant!

Once we punched that control, we worked our way around one more bay that was thankfully mostly open beach and into the last transition area. It was about 4:00am. The 25 km of coasteering had taken us almost 10 hours.

After brilliantly keeping up with 36 maps for almost 8 days, I apparently ran out of luck. There were 37 maps. When I exchanged map 35 for map 36 during the last trek, I must have left the map pocket of my pack unzipped. We had no map 37. And no way to cycle to CP 53 and then the finish line.



Fate would lend a hand. We found a copy of map 37 and took a digital picture of it. Then, using the digital camera's zoom feature, we were able to navigate to CP53 and

on to the finish line. We finished right at 7:00am on the eighth day of the race - 730 km and 7 days and 22 hours after we started! Team Dancing Pandas had done it! We bagged all 53 checkpoints and finished in 26th place overall. Gretchen and Rob and a whole host of volunteers and race staff were there to greet us at the finish line with champagne and pizzas!

Total sleep: 24 hrs  
Total Bike: 430 km  
Total Paddle: 120 km  
Total Trek: 180 km

Totally fun!

