



## Team BIGFISH Mount Buller Adventure Race Weekend

This is a tale of our "excellent" adventure challenge in the Victorian Alps in the AROC Sport Mount Buller race 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> March 2006.

### Friday 10<sup>th</sup> March

**6:00 am** - Team BIGFISH (TB) set out from Collaroy Plateau (on Sydney's northern beaches), destination Mt Buller, Victoria. This was to be a weekend faced with many challenges, both physical and mental, that was to test our personal and team resources. TB is made of me, Garry aka Gazza (at 52 the elder statesman and founder of TB), Chris aka Dudey Boy (21, who is like a son to me & an original team member) and Mark aka Marky (32, a good friend and work colleague and recent convert to AR). This is the longest AR event that TB has undertaken so far.



After a long 10 hour drive, we arrived at Buller late Friday, unpacked the car, checked the bikes over and did an equipment inspection ensuring that we had all the mandatory team and personal items that are required under the AROC race rules. Agreeing we were ready, we settled back to enjoy a relaxing dinner at our hotel while discussing our tactics for the first race tomorrow morning. We had a good plan & strategy worked out to follow, now all we had to do was put it into action. But as can happen with the best of well laid plans, a small deviation here and there, and woops you can easily go the wrong way.

### Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> March

**5:30 am** - The alarm went off and it was time to click into race mode. Up we got, had a good healthy breakfast including plenty of liquids. Checked out all the gear again, then into the car & off we went to the race start at Goughs Bay near Mansfield, about an hours drive down from Buller.



**7:15 am** - At the start area along with the other 18 teams, and off to the registration where maps, race instructions and race bibs (TB drew the lucky #13) were issued. Then over to complete formalities with a mandatory equipment check. Alina did a thorough check of all our backpacks to ensure that we had all the items that may be needed in case of injury, getting lost, keeping hydrated and even for snakebite (hey, that wasn't in the race information). Then it was back down to our tables and chairs by the car to study the course, race instructions and mark up our maps with our intended route. Onto the race briefing by Tom where details and reminders of the race rules and potential hazards were given one last time to all the teams, who were by now all kitted up and ready to race. Off to the start we headed. Today's race was estimated at between 6 to 9 hours (6 for the better teams and up to 9 for the rest of us).



**9:00 am** - We are aboard our kayaks, donned with PFD's, on the lake lined up side by side waiting the siren. 10 seconds later Alina blasts the hooter and we are off. After the frenetic start with kayaks dodging each other and the dead trees that are scattered throughout the lake we settled down into a steady but solid paddling rhythm and headed for Checkpoint #1 (CP1), about a 1km paddle, it was located up an old dry creek bed some 500m from the water line. Teams were going in several different directions (the clever ones went, of course, in the right direction), pushing and navigating their way through shrubs, bushes, old logs and debris. Once up the creek bed CP1 was found, our control card punched, and it was back down the same creek bed and back onto the kayaks. After another 2 km paddle to a mooring

point on the lake, we then had a short swim (fully clothed, with shoes, backpacks, PFD's and all) across to shore and onto the first of the rogaine legs. This section required us to get CP's 2 to 5. After making our way up the first spur to CP2, we made mistake #1 at CP3, which costs us about 15 minutes & some extra energy. Then it was onwards following the contours, dry creek beds & navigating the dense vegetation. At last CP5 on a knoll overlooking Lake Eildon and we were done and it was back down for a swim back to the kayak and another 1km or so paddle back to our next mooring point near the start area. This left us with a 100mm swim together carrying our paddles back to shore and into Transition Area #1 (TA1).



Having run up the steps and put our electronic tag into the timing device at the TA we were off with the PFD's and on with the helmets - it was time for the first bike leg. I should say now that I am not the world's best mountain bike rider, in fact, I am very slow and rely on doing well with the Nav and other disciplines. Another check of the map (Mark was chief navigator today) and we were off. After a relatively easy shortish ride up hill and down dale we were at TA2. After clocking in, it was out with the map and off to find CP's 6-10 in any order. We chose to do CP10 first and 6 last, which in hindsight proved to be not the best decision decision, mistake #2. After a good start to CP10, we went over

a hill to find CP9 at the bottom of a gully in a recently cleared plantation area. A steep climb down to get CP9, which led to an even steeper climb back up. Back on the top (now puffing quite hard) we were off to find CP's 8 & 7 in good time and finally off to CP6. We took a bearing, but for some reason we did not seem to follow it. After several attempts, a lot of ground covered, and plenty of energy used we had to decide to find it or leave it (missing a CP incurred a time penalty of 15mins). As TB are a bit stubborn & don't like to miss any CPs we pressed on up another long spur then down the gully and eventually we had CP6. We did a team high 5 and cheered ourselves for finding it, but also knew that it had cost us plenty of time (some 45 minutes) and significant effort to do so. It was time for some nourishment and liquid intake on our way back to TA3 and the next bike leg. The 35 degree heat was starting to take it's toll. It is very important that we try and eat something about every hour or so during the race. Back at TA3 we clocked in, on with the helmets, map back on the map board and away we went. On this leg we had to find CP's 11 to 18. A relatively flat (for the most part) and very scenic ride through some farms, then we followed the river bed along & over into the pine plantations. Down some fantastic single track back to the river and across it to finally pick up CP 18. This leg went pretty well expect for CP15 which was at a dam we went past and then had to double back to get. A little more time used up.

We were now into TA4, on with the PFD's again and some welcome cool relief with the tube rafting leg down the creek. After running up to get CP19 upstream we eagerly jumped in for a what we hoped would be a leisurely float down the creek to CP20, Not to be ! The water levels were very low and we had to walk down most of it. The cool water was very however very refreshing. Later we found out from Tom that a snake was seen there the day before! Snakes again! This done and CP20 clicked onto the control card we were back to clock in for TA5. Off with the PFD's (I actually rode off in mine, and had to take it back) and on with the helmets for the next bike leg.



Off we went to find CP's 21 to 25, this looked relatively easy we thought, and maybe we could pick up some time here. Not to be. CP21, where the hell was it ? We looked and looked, even combined with another team but still to no avail.

Time was getting away from us, so reluctantly we had to give it up and move on. We later found out that several other teams had trouble here too. Following a rugged path along the farm fence lines we reached the top of a hill and saw another team jumping the fence cycling down the slopes back to a more friendly looking track. Big mistake #3 for the day happened when we decided to follow, even after looking at our map we thought it was OK. Wrong ! Instead of staying on the right track (which we were on) this took us way of course and even in the wrong direction. This not only caused us to miss CP22 but also consumed a lot more time and energy, both of which, about 8 hours into the event were starting to dwindle. We completed this leg picking up CPs 23 & 24 on the way to TA 6. We were now out of water and at the TA came the welcome relief with having water supplies to restock our bottles.

As the time was about 5pm. Tom who met us at this TA, advised that we should team up with another who arrived with us, American Pie to complete this last rogaie leg. So it was that 8 of us headed out - the two combined teams now known as either American Bigfish or Bigfish Pie along with Tom and our intrepid photographer Chris. With Tom throwing in some navigation tips we soon got round this section and collected CPs 25 to 32 and clocked in at TA7.

The next bike leg was meant to take us on a journey through some steep climbs to pick up CPs 33 & 34. Due to our late time we were forced to miss this section and were sent straight back to TA8/Finish line. We later found out that this section included a torturous hill of about 1 km, with some racers calling it "sadistic" . We were not sorry that we missed this ! Back to Goughs Bay where it all started, we expected to be swimming back to the kayaks and getting the final CP35 on the lake. But time had beaten us, it was now about 6pm and 9 hours since we started.

We did not have to do any more racing today, all that was left was to clock in at TA8 and the Finish line. We were done, well and truly done! Only 4 of teams managed to complete the entire course.

Time to switch off from racing mode, try and let the mind and body slip back into something like normal, pump in plenty of liquid, remove the sweat soaked clothes and sit down and relax. This had been a toughest ever day racing for TB and we were all pretty exhausted. Looking around all the other teams seemed to be the same.

With tonight's dinner due to start at 7:00 pm, we packed up all the gear, had a 50 minutes drive back to Buller, into the hotel, unpack some of our smelly gear, into the shower and off for dinner with the rest of the teams. Lots of pasta (carbs) and salads to help replenish the body with lots of liquid (only one beer) and a chat about the race today with the other teams and then it was back to the hotel & into bed.

And this was only the end of Day 1!

### Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> March

6:30 am - Wake up & prepare for Day 2. We could enjoy a lie in today with the race being at Buller. Into another big healthy & energy giving breakfast to prepare us for another gruelling day. Over breakfast we discussed our plans for the day and reminded ourselves not to make the same errors as yesterday. We had to remember what we had learnt about navigation and also some of Tom's tips from yesterday.

7:30am - It was off to the start area to assemble, pick up our maps and mark out our route. Together with checking the bikes we had another compulsory equipment check before moving up for the pre race briefing. After Tom again went through the formalities of various important directions needed, we lined up along the steps to be greeted with sweeping views across the mountains.

9:00am - Alina started the race and the mad initial scramble was on again. Today's first leg was a relatively short rogaie around the Mt Buller village area where we had to collect 13 CPs from an available 16 given on the map. Off we went sticking strictly with our planning. A good run around with 13 CPs on our card we were back to check in at TA1. Now on with the helmets and we off on the bikes for a longish bike leg firstly through a steep rocky area though a quarry and then along some 4wd tracks which meandered through the beautiful hillsides of the alps all the way through to Mt Stirling. This section of the race would see us pick up CP's 17 to 22, which had one CP 150m up and old creek bed and another located in an old cabin along the road. With a rule that all team members must stay 20m within each CP in meant that we were all off and on the bikes at most CPs. A good section for us.



We reached TA2 in good time and headed off on foot for the longest rogaie of the day. This leg would see us running, walking and scrambling our way up and down through creeks, spurs, dense shrubs & through the dreaded blackberry bushes. We collected 23 to 28 in good time and with some great navigation this leg was probably our best single section of the two days. Back into the TA area and once we checked in to TA3 we where required to carry out a compulsory gear check before moving on. This is done randomly throughout the race to ensure that all teams are carrying the necessary equipment. Time penalties and even disqualification apply if you don't have them. From TA3 we headed off on the bike in 4<sup>th</sup> place (our best position ever).

Back onto the bike to collect CPs 29 to 31 we had the longest & hardest bike leg of the two days, a journey that took us back up along the 4wd tracks we had just been down (now mostly uphill) until we hit a turn off to what was a great single track which wound back down the mountain for 3 kms of so. Of course after enjoying this great downhill run the inevitable had to happen - we had to go uphill. So, with some more single track uphill sections we would find our way back onto Mt Buller road for the trip back to the summit. To this point only one team had past us, putting us into 5<sup>th</sup> place. Then it was onto a long and winding climb up the road for some 4 to 5 kms which took everything I had left in my old legs, and I was holding my younger teammates up.

All the while they would keep encouraging me with words like "you can make it", "just one more corner" & "c'mon Gazza we're nearly there". And make it I did, with their help, to the turn off that was a welcome downhill run to the chairlift. Yes, a chairlift. I had expected that with my slow pace up the hill we would be swamped by many other teams, however only two teams passed us on this section putting us back into 7<sup>th</sup> spot - a position which we were the to hold until the finish. Onto the chairlift with our bikes on our laps and a very enjoyable and scenic ride up the mountain. Time to enjoy the views, grab a drink and recover a little from the hill climb. Off the chairlift and back on the bikes for the final push up hill to the summit carpark and TA4.



With all CP's successfully found we completed the final bike leg for the weekend and dropped our bikes and helmets at TA4. We clocked in at TA4 and we were off on the final leg of the race. Back on foot for this last rogaine, we were immediately faced with a steep 100m climb to the highest point at Mt Buller. Up to the top and across to CP32 on a knoll overlooking the valleys & mountains beyond we took time out for a couple of photos. It would have been great to have more time to admire and appreciate the beauty of the area. Then over to CP33 along a rocky ridge which provided more magnificent panoramic vistas of the alps. "Lets go boys" Marky yelled, and off we went back down past the summit carpark and on our way winding around the sides of Mount Buller. CP34 found and down into the village for the final two CPs. Both these were at the University building with CP35 at the top of a lookout area, where we then got harnesses on for a 20m abseil down the side of the building, back round into the lift where CP36 was found and back up to road level. All that was left was a short run across the road and up the steps to the finish line.

About 2:00 pm: "Yes" we cried as we climbed the steps to the finish and the end of two days of fantastic adventure racing. We were clearly very excited about our 7<sup>th</sup> place finish today and great improvement from Saturday, Plus, just the fact we completed the course. We congratulated each other, while being cheered on by Tom and Alina and others around the finish area. It was exhilarating and exciting stuff, and the adrenalin took a while to stop flowing. We stayed around a while basking in our own glory, while grabbing a sausage sandwich and drink, chatting with the others and cheering on the other teams as they crossed the finish line.



Then it was back to normal and reality. Lets collect our sweaty gear and bikes, pack up the car and head to the hotel for some R & R before tonight's dinner and presentation party.

3:00pm - Back at the hotel, it was in for a hot shower then we headed down stairs to the hotels hot spa where we could sit back, stretch and relax our tired bodies in the warm bubbling waters. Also time now to sit and recollect on our weekend's achievements. Back up to the room for a cup of tea and a quick nap before the last hard task of the weekend - cleaning up the car and the gear. Surprisingly it did not take us long to sort out all the stuff we had including the wet, smelly clothes into some order back into the wagon for the trip home tomorrow morning. What a difference we noticed with finishing early giving enough time to enjoy the race, the finish ,the post race and relax before going out.



7:00pm- Now onto the Cattlemen's Hotel for the Presentation dinner & party. Time to sit back, and kick the heels up. Time to enjoy a beer or two while mingling with the other teams recalling the good and not so good experiences from the weekend. AR people are a unique breed and truly nice people to be among. After a sumptuous roast dinner with lots of vegies and some really yummy deserts it was onto the evening's presentations. AROC (Tom & Alina) presented prizes out to the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> placegetters for the mixed, male & female teams. Congratulations went to them all. Team BIGFISH for the record finished 12<sup>th</sup> on Saturday, 7<sup>th</sup> on Sunday & 11<sup>th</sup> overall (5<sup>th</sup> of the male teams). So while no prizes were won, we still felt like winners for just having taken part and completing the event.



And we are in no doubt that everyone who participated including the support crew and volunteers were winners. Then it was party time! The band cranked up the volume, and slowly one by one people were being attracted to the dance floor. Despite some tired legs we managed to put on some pretty fancy moves and "busted" the night away. But all good things must come to an end and around 11:00pm it was time to call it quits and head home and into bed. And didn't that bed feel good !



### Monday 13<sup>th</sup> March



7:30am - Time to rise, down for a leisurely buffet breakfast in the hotel with views overlooking the valleys across to Mt Stirling. This morning was cold windy and raining. We were glad that it was not like this the last two days. We put the rest of gear in the car, the bikes on the back and it was time to leave Mt Buller and the 10 hour trip back home to Sydney. On the trip home we had great fun talking about the races, we had great memories of the fantastic country side we had seen, we had great pride in what we had achieved and we had some great laughs about the bloopers we made along the way. The race will long be remembered.

### Our story would be not complete without a few special thank you's, so here goes:

**AROC Sport** - Tom & Alina are amazing. Apart from being the premier adventure racers in the country they are also outstanding people and fantastic AR organisers. In setting both challenging and beautiful courses they test not only the best athletes, they also allow the novices the opportunity to improve their skills while at the same time still have some fun. We love them both and hope they keep don't stop doing what they do.

**The Volunteers** - Just how good are these people? They are fantastic! They spend the whole race time manning the various TAs and course routes, while always putting on a happy face and encouraging everyone. It is so good to have someone say "good on you" 5 to 6 hours into an event. Well done to them all, we really appreciate you.

**The Photographers** - Mark, Chris & Lindi. These guys are also super. They seem to be everywhere around the course, but there is only 3 of them. How do they do it? Their graphic images that are captured from the weekend help provide us (the competitors) with permanent memories of this weekend adventure. On top of that that are really nice people and pretty good dancers as well.

**No Roads Expeditions.** A film crew from No Roads were along for the weekend to film a documentary of the weekend races. Team BIGFISH were among some of the selected teams to be featured in the filming. They did a great job following the teams and popping up in the most unexpected locations around the course capturing the spirit of the race. We enjoyed their company and they were always full of encouragement.

Well, d....d....d.....d....d....dats all folks !

We look forward to Mt Buller 2007 and our next "excellent" adventure race - bring it on !

Written by Gazza  
(aka Bluefin) for Team BIGFISH

