

Stories from 14WRC in Australia

▣ Eric Smith, CNYO

Our two week trip to the 14th World Rogaining Championships (14WRC) in Australia divided itself into three parts, a week of hiking in the West Macdonnell range, just to the other side of Alice Springs from the event venue, to familiarize ourselves with the general nature of the terrain at a more leisurely pace; the event itself including a Model Event; then a few more days for recovery in the vicinity of Darwin and Litchfield National Park up by the north coast of the Northern Territory before returning home.

Fast forward to the 14WRC...

After the Model Event, late in the afternoon, we moved on to the event center, set up our tent, got our gear unloaded and the car parked in a more remote lot, then walked over to the opening ceremonies for the event, met a bunch of old acquaintances, and picked up our registration packet.

Administratively, everything seemed extremely well planned out in advance, and the facilities at the Ross River Resort, once in the distant past an operating cattle station, in more recent decades a rustic tourist resort, with good camping facilities, rental cabins for people who had applied early on in the process, good kitchen facilities for the organizers, and convenient toilet, shower, and dishwashing facilities for all the campers and other participants.

With 700 participants, everything seemed to be arranged so that there was seldom much waiting around in lines, both on arrival, and the next morning at map handout and on check-in at the start corral.

The Navlight e-punching system was used for the event, being heavily used in Australia and New Zealand for rogainng. From my view as a competitor, it is rather more nicely designed for being banded onto wrists than



SI cards are (to ensure that all team members actually go to controls together), and the organizers had at least two punches at each control to protect against the possible failure of one of the units during the event, with three or four at all the controls relatively near to the hash-house to avoid long lines of people waiting to get to the first-visited controls. All the e-punching stuff seemed to go very smoothly, and results were out very shortly after everybody was back at the hash-house.

The maps were huge, nearly a meter by over half a meter, 1:25,000 scale, 10 meter formline contours with a moderate number of 5 meter formline contours used in the less steep parts of the map, and printed on very tough, heavyweight waterproof paper. (*For entire map, full results, photos, and lots more -<http://worldrogainingchamps.com.au/>*)

Maps were distributed at 9 am on Saturday morning, and we had already decided that we would risk using them without any protective plastic bagging—a decision that worked out fine. We were told there were 89 controls, and I think the maximum available score must have been something over 6000 points.

We had decided that it would be foolish to try for anything more than about 60K actual distance (more like 40K straight line), given the ruggedness of the terrain, and the presence of considerable amounts of spinifex (a spiny grass-like plant growing in clumps), and planned an intended route of 25 or so controls over about 56K in the northern half of the map, which seemed to offer the possibility of a lot less climb, and fewer opportunities to get lost seriously in the very long mid-winter Australian nighttime hours.

Our plan seemed to be working out very well for us for the first six or seven hours, and with the cooler temperatures we were mov-

ing at somewhat above our expected pace. Unfortunately as evening started coming around, it became clear that while Mary was still doing fine, I apparently had not been doing an adequate job over the preceding few days in keeping up my hydration or electrolyte levels, and I started getting incipient leg cramps and going slower and slower. At a bit before midnight, I started beginning to worry that we (I, anyway) might be going so slowly that we would have a problem even getting back to the finish on time, even without doing any more controls.

We eventually dropped our last control scheduled before a visit to the All Night Café, a remotely located smaller hash-house. In retrospect, the decision to drop this 100 point control when we only had about 30 meters more climb to reach it seems pretty stupid, but it is hard to know how one's condition will evolve over a couple of hours. We then spent about 3 hours at the hash-house while Mary took a nap, and I tried to drink a lot of Gatorade and eat a hamburger and a grilled cheese sandwich, and try to alternate between sitting and standing positions without putting my legs into spasms.

Eventually, at 4:30 in the morning, we set out on a pretty direct route back to the finish area, unfortunately through an area where we had already visited most of the controls. There was one control we could pick up after about 3 or 4 km of walking if we were getting back to a more reasonable speed, and 3 that we could then try from the original intended end of our route if things kept going better.

In fact, we were soon going at pretty much our original pace as my body started getting back into better equilibrium and we actually had time at the end to add in a fifth control in that part of things. Sadly, though, this route for getting back didn't actually save a whole lot of distance, and again in retrospect we should have probably stuck with something more like our original plan, with maybe just trimming out one or two controls.

However, many of the other teams in our geriatric category apparently also ran into some sort of problems during the day, and rather to our surprise we actually finished up 2nd in the XUV division (but several hundred points behind the winners in the category). So we didn't have to go home with lots of regrets!

All photos courtesy 14WRC2016

All-Night Cafés (ANC) are commonly used in Australasian rogaines where the Hash House is not central to the competition area. It is a place where competitors can get freshly cooked hot food, refill their water carriers and, if they wish, rest a while by the fire in the company of other weary fellow travellers. At 14WRC, the ANC was 12km east of the Hash House and located very central to the eastern portion of the competition area. Of the 300 teams, over 200 visited the ANC.



Ups & Downs of a Rogaine

▣ **Sharon Crawford**, RMO, 1st place Women's Ultra Veteran with Robin Spriggs

I raced with long-time Australian teammate, Robin Spriggs in the 14th WRC at the Ross River Resort in the Northern Territory of Australia, 86 km northwest of Alice Springs. This rogaine was a fantastic experience, an adventure in the incredible outback of central Australia. The terrain had a surprising variety of complex land forms, rock and vegetation, including sharp spiny spinifex grass to deal with, but also delightful wildflowers.

Our one big mistake in the middle of the night going to #105 (*see map snippet below*) was because we did not read/interpret the map carefully enough. The night was long, but mild - Robin never did put on her jacket - and we were really enjoying the navigation.

We had had good success linking controls in the dark on the south-central part of the map in spinifex covered hills, weaving east along small ridges. But a ridge route to #105 looked complex, especially in the dark. Instead we opted to drop down north to a valley, walk a km along it, then broadside back up to the control.

However, we did not keep careful track of our progress in the valley - it was difficult to interpret land forms with a headlamp from below. After we had gone the approximate required distance, we climbed south up onto a long hill, and saw two different sets of headlights in the distance. Great! But we still had to cross a big reentrant to get to a second ridge system, and the other lights were long gone. The control was supposed to be in a little reentrant off the south side.

To make a long story short, we wasted a lot of time in the middle of the night suffering from a parallel error. Things "seemed" to fit, but where was the flag? Without reflector material of any kind on the flags, you had to be dead on to find them.

Guess we had gotten careless/tired/fallen asleep. We ignored two map reading clues: the hill just west of the reentrant was shown broader on the map than the narrower one we were near; and the lower part of the reentrant we were searching in curled around and drained back through a saddle to the north, not staying on the southeast side of the hill.

At long last, just as we were about to abandon our search for the elusive #105, it finally dawned on us that we were 200m west looking in a reentrant not-so-parallel after all. To test our new theory - we were going to abandon to the east anyway - we proceeded 200m into a new reentrant, and even then nearly walked right by the flag, fortunately spotted in the dark by Robin hardly 20 feet away.

A hundred points, but it had cost us big time. Learn from it, regain our vigilance, have no more big errors in the night, enjoy the next morning, and carefully cherry-pick our way back to the Hash House to arrive in time.

In all respects, the organizers, mappers, course setters, and army of volunteers did a truly magnificent job providing an unforgettable adventure to all participants in a very unique and wonderful setting in the outback of Australia.

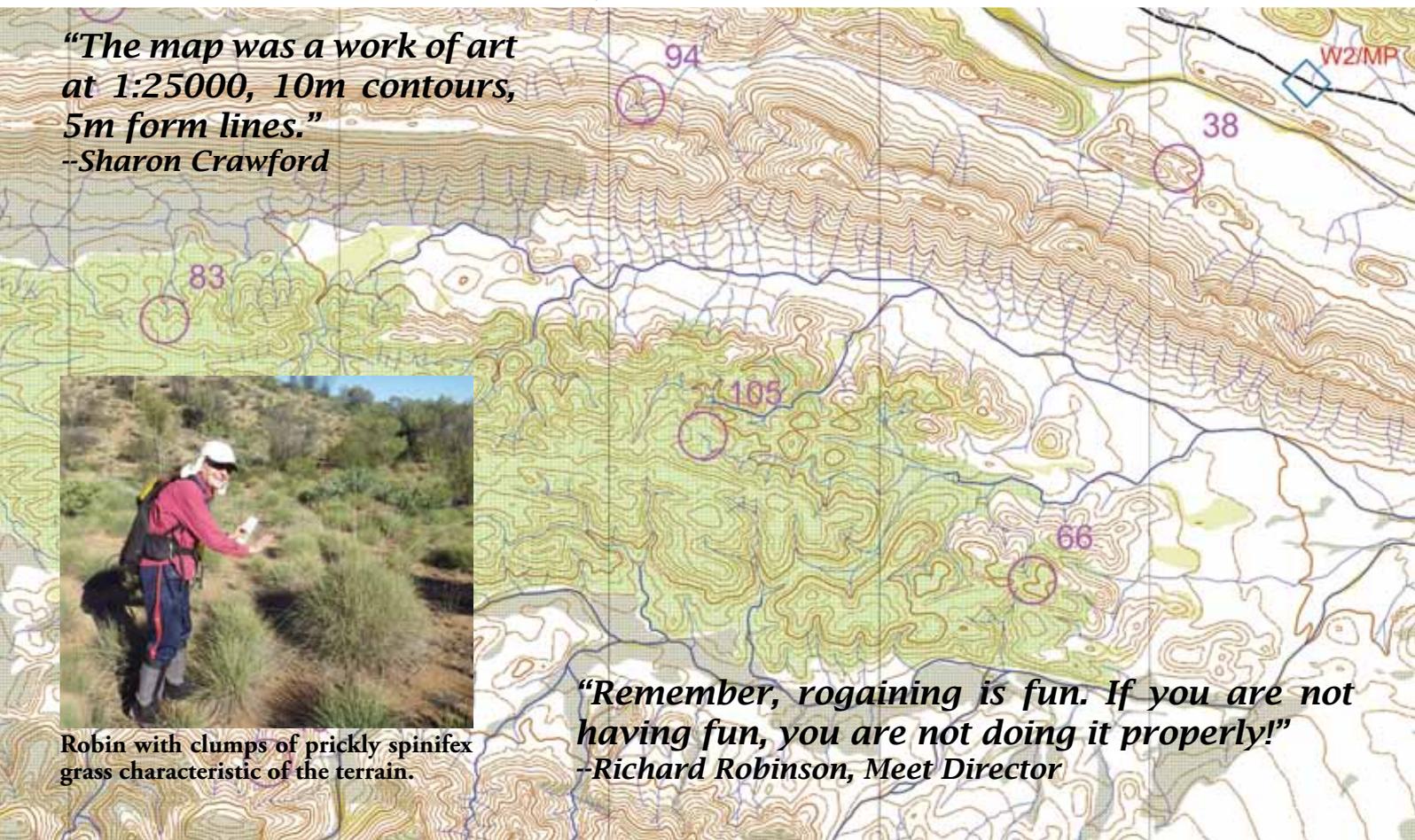


"The map was a work of art at 1:25000, 10m contours, 5m form lines."
--Sharon Crawford



Robin with clumps of prickly spinifex grass characteristic of the terrain.

"Remember, rogaining is fun. If you are not having fun, you are not doing it properly!"
--Richard Robinson, Meet Director



No Worries Down Under

We loved the event. The weather was perfect. We stayed out the full 24 hours, sleeping on the course in a dry riverbed for 3 hours as planned when the moon was absent. The soft sand and space blankets made for a good rest, but a disrupted one because Catherine kept making the space blankets rustle - they are noisy little suckers. The moon was a great help, particularly as we found we didn't have a working compass. (We had two new ones at the Hash House but before the start I had decided that we could get just one more use out of the 40 year old ones we carried - wrong as it turned out.)

Fortunately, between the prominent landforms, Scorpio, the Southern Cross and the moon, it was possible to manage really well without a compass. The countryside of the McDonnell Ranges is exquisite. It is desert country, but with prolific flowers after the recent rains. Some of the rock formations have to be seen to be believed, I have no idea how they could have formed. (My ignorance reflects badly on me, but worse on my geologist brother Neil, who has walked with me in similar areas and obviously failed to pass on this useful information.)

We were one of the many teams who were there to participate and enjoy the event, rather than be fiercely competitive. We ended up coming in the middle of the Mixed division, exactly the same position as we got in Prague in 2002 - nice. The efficiency of the map handout had to be seen to be believed, similarly for the catering. All in all, a fantastic experience.

-- Rod Phillips (the "RO" in Rogaine) and Catherine Crock, AU



Since Rogaining originated in Australia, when we learned the 2016 World Championships were being held in the Outback, we jumped at the chance to attend. It was highly encouraged to come early, mostly to get acclimated to the area, but also to try out the nearby model course so we'd know what to expect on the big day. We were REALLY glad we went out on the model course map, as it became quite obvious we were going to have to let go of any crazy ideas of running all over the map to grab as many points as we could.

While beautiful, the terrain was dry like a desert, rugged, and when steep, the footing was very loose. We made the best decision we've ever had for a 24 hour rogaine....we were going to focus on having fun!

We opted to stay at a fairly low elevation for the most part, and to give up any idea of accomplishing much in the dark. We went out for 9 hours before hitting the Hash House to refuel and sleep. Our second loop, while shorter at just under 5 hours, was greeted by a beautiful sunrise and breakfast.

After we finished, we loved watching the top teams running in under the time cut off. It's a blast getting to be around the top competitors, seeing how they prepped before, and how energetic they still seemed when finished.

--Heidi and Bill Cusworth, USA

Organization of Volunteers at WRC

The 2016 WRC were far removed from major population centres and from where most Australian rogainers lived. One of my lasting impressions is of the Ross River WRC campsite with over 100 volunteers who had travelled from their home cities to offer their services to make this event a success. It was a large staff for an event of 700 competitors from 20 countries; but then this was not a normal weekend rogaine.

Many of the volunteers came in groups, or as families, or simply as individuals, and drove their four-wheel drives from Cairns, Perth, Hobart, Sydney and Melbourne. Such starting points mean little until one looks at a map and realises that these are 2000 to 3000 km one-way road trips: think Los Angeles to Chicago. Unfortunately for some, the recent rain meant many dirt roads in central Australia were closed and this added 100s of kms for many drivers. And a small number of volunteers even came from overseas.

The volunteer groups had come from most of the Australian state rogaining associations, and although their practices at home and experiences varied slightly, they were completely professional in their camping and assisting

at the event. This cohesion no doubt owed much to the preparation and training of the volunteers leading up to the event. For many, 14WRC was a perfect opportunity to meet new rogaining friends and to exchange ideas on making events work smoothly. The hospitality culture that characterises the typical friendly rogaining hash house was alive and well as volunteers went about their jobs helping the competitors have a memorable time.

By providing detailed information about the course and doing so early, organisers ensured a high degree of fairness for all teams, including the many who were unfamiliar with spinifex or the Australian desert environment.

The practice of distributed organisation of a rogaine has been used



before with organisers living in different cities. However, 14WRC tested this distributed concept on a scale that I had never seen before. With modern communications and relatively cheap travel, the distributed organisational model provides many opportunities for innovation on any continent. Maybe a WRC in western USA with volunteers working from home in eastern USA or Canada, and/or coming to the event to lend their time and camaraderie would work. This suddenly makes the task of organising a future World Rogaining Championships much more viable for smaller but keen communities.

--Neil Phillips (*the "NE" in Rogaine*), AU



2017 Wilson Awards Applications Due January 15, 2017

Applications for the \$1,000 Iain Wilson Character Through Competition Award and the \$1,000 Wilson Community Growth Grant are available today at www.orienteingusa.org/wilsonaward and www.orienteingusa.org/wilsongrant. Applications must be received by January 15, 2017 with awards announced in late February.

Character Through Competition Award

The Iain Wilson Character Through Competition Award provides \$1,000 for orienteering-related travel to deserving junior orienteers. Interested orienteers aged 20 and under complete a simple application focusing on their goals and motivations as well as their plans to achieve these goals. Recommendation letters from teachers, mentors and coaches will round out our understanding of the individual. Awardees will show competitive spirit, friendship and qualities that leave others feeling good about the world.



These awards honor the memory of Iain Wilson. Iain was a dedicated orienteer whose spirit and dedication inspired those around him.

Community Growth Grant

The Wilson Community Growth Grant provides \$1,000 to grantees to expand the sport of orienteering among young individuals. Funds are to be used to develop and

implement programs aimed at expanding access to orienteering for youth. The award committee encourages creativity, sustainable programming and efforts to connect with underserved youth. Awardees will be selected based on several criteria, including the number of youth to be served and the expected impact on each individual.

Applicants must partner with an Orienteering USA-affiliated club, Orienteering USA or a registered nonprofit organization, which will disburse and administer funds. The grant may be used for materials and equipment, transportation, facility rental or other appropriate uses. The scope of potential program grants is broad. It could include school-based programming and after-school activities, free local events, and equipment for youth offerings.