

Helly Adventure X
Lakeside – Lake Windermere
28/29th March 2009
Race Report – Team Aberdeen Asset
Bruce Duncan, **Tom Gibbs**, Nick Gracie

This weekend saw the first ever Adventure Decathlon involving 19 of the top 3 man/women/mixed teams in the country competing over 10 contrasting outdoor events for the top prize of £2500 and to be crowned the inaugural champions.

All the teams assembled at 7.30am Saturday morning after arriving the previous night and camping or arriving in the morning after early starts. Trailplus impresario, Paul Magner, gave the initial briefing, explaining that teams would be put in groups for the first five stages and the results would be a closely guarded secret, to be revealed after the fifth event. Four more events would happen in the afternoon and new groups, based on overall position would be formed.

Most of the teams knew each other, so there was some good chat and banter as we walked to our first challenge, the Climbing Wall Traverse, but as soon as we were in and given our instructions it was race mode. The challenge was to traverse a wall as far as possible in 3 minutes. As you got around the wall however the height got lower and lower and holds smaller, making it harder to go just that little bit further. We worked well together and once the results were published got a credible 2nd place for our efforts.

The challenge was short, so we were quickly back at base chatting again while we waited to head off to the Adventure Biathlon. Thoughts of rifles and ski's were dashed as this turned out to be a short running loop followed by an Archery shoot, the run was enough to really get you out of breath, especially as you only had 5 mins to get round 3 times and shoot 3 arrows on each lap. We were solid on this one, with Tom starting out with a bullseye, sadly not something he'd repeat, but it did scare the other teams. Another 2nd place and we were off to a good start.

The assault course then beckoned. As with the other challenges the details were secret so had no idea what lay ahead, and as we were the first team off in our group we had no advantage of being able to see what others did, not that you could see much. We set off fast, knowing that we needed to make no mistakes, and working as a team we quickly polished off the wobbly bridge, bosons chair, high wall and balance beam to post a solid time, which later turned out to be only 1 second behind the fastest team, and 2 seconds ahead of the 3rd placed team, these short events were proving to be very close run things.

The mystery discipline was next. This involved getting as much water around a course of 3 large water pipes in 10 minutes. We had 3 small cups, and all team members had to get all the way round. Tom and Nick worked well here as they had a size advantage, but me, being a wee bit bigger, struggled through the pipes, which slowed us down a little. Our technique wasn't the best either, and being the first team to go off had no advantage of seeing what anyone else tried, this turned out to be our worst stage of the race.

The final morning activity was a mountain bike time trial. This was a fast 2 laps of the course around the grounds of YMCA lakeside. The course had been ridden by lots of people in the morning, so had got a bit broken up making it a little slower, and sections were faster to run than to ride. The course was also very fast so you were instantly in oxygen debt. All 3 of us rode well and completed the course with no injuries or mechanical issues and finished in 2nd place yet again.

In the afternoon we were all regrouped depending on the mornings results, we had done well enough to be leading and so in the top group with 3 other all male teams. The afternoon comprised 4 more events, soon we were stood on the start line of the fell race, a short and fast 4km run up and down the steep hill out the back of the YMCA. It was a very fast race, and with us all running our lungs out, Nick almost literally, we managed to complete the course in a combined time of 52:54, a little over a minute behind the first team, and only 20 seconds ahead of the 3rd team.

Our legs were hurting after the short fast hill run, so we were glad of the rest we were to get when we took to the open canoes. We had to race twice round the shortened course due to strong winds out of the bay.

The course was pretty fast, and again teams were very close together at the end, meaning that there was no room for error, something that Grippid and Sorted didn't quite get, managing to capsize 3 times while trying to set off!

We had a longer rest after the canoe, and then it was orienteering. We were looking forward to this event, as we knew we had the skills for this one. All of us are good navigators, and it was a huge advantage over many of the other teams. The course was relatively simple, but at the pace we were running it was easy to make a mistake which could be costly. Tom navigated well around the course taking a smooth route to all controls, and bringing us back into first place, and crucially some of our closest rivals struggled with their lack of navigation skills, enabling us to get more of a cushion for the later events where we knew we'd struggle against their faster speed.



The day had been dogged by high winds, which meant that the sailing section was replaced with a kayak stage. All 3 of us were quite happy with this choice, as we are all novice sailors, but some teams had really been looking forward to getting a high score against some of the faster teams here.

The kayaks were quite cosy for some, and after a full day of on off racing, legs were starting to cramp up, not something you want when paddling a boat on cold water! It was a frantic wee time trail around the buoys, and some teams who had not expected to have to kayak really struggled, VO₂, one of our closest rivals had Joe who was a great kayaker, but Elliot, who is usually just the muscle when in a double boat, really tussled with his boat, saying he could have swum it faster.

At the end of Saturday, we were very happy and slightly surprised to be sitting in first place, 100 points ahead of Accelerate in 2nd, and 155 points clear of VO₂ in 3rd. We then did the maths and worked out what we had to do for Sunday. The main thing was to finish, but keep an eye on the other teams.

Saturday night was spent having a social meal with many of the other teams, which was really good to chat about the day and talk about other events in the future, and to catch up on what everyone had been up to over the winter.

Sunday dawned crystal clear but very cold. Soon however the sun had melted away the frost, and teams were milling around getting ready for the 10am start. Unlike Saturday, there was 270 teams racing in the final adventure challenge. The 19 teams taking part in the full Adventure X race were set off 1 minute clear of the rest of the race, but we would be doing the same course, and would see many of them out on the course.

The first run was tough, straight up to the top of the hill we ran up the previous day, but then extended to take in more of the hill, and to spread out the 270 teams behind us. There was not a cloud in the sky, and the views were stunning from the top, but sadly we had no time to stop and take them all in.

As soon as we were at the top of the hill, we were back down again, and soon jumping onto our Marin bikes for a 90 minute ride through Graythwaite and Grizedale. This is where our race started to fall apart. I had a major problem with my custom cranks, the pedal came off and threaded itself and as such we couldn't get it back on and so we were resigned to race the rest of the 30+km with just one pedal on my bike.

I had to run all the uphill sections, and Tom and Nick did a fantastic job pushing and towing me along the flatter sections, as I pedalling as much as I could to keep the speed up. At one steep hill the tow slipped out of my hand and a karabiner shot at full speed into the back of Toms head, which hurt a lot I think he said! After this little incident Nick then snapped his chain, everything that could go wrong was doing so, our bikes which are usually so reliable were playing up.

We managed to push on as fast as we could, well aware that we had to finish the race to be in with a chance of taking the £2500 first prize, luckily our nearest rivals, Team Accelerate, were behind us. We were only overtaken by 1 team on the bike, which was testament to Tom and Nick's towing and pushing power and the quality of the Marin bikes, to which I was very grateful.

Back into transition we threw our life jackets on and had a quick loop to complete in open canoes. The sun was beating out of the sky, and it would have been a great day to leisurely paddle up the lake, but we were still in full race mode, so as soon as were back on land, it was straight off to a short fast run to the finish.

Because of the pedal issues, I had really worked my right leg, which tried to cramp up on the final run, so we had to slow the pace slightly. Soon the run was over, and just the skis (2 planks of wood that you all stand on, and have to walk in unison), cargo net and slippery wall stood in our way.

Once over the wall, we finished in 6th place, a pretty commendable effort considering the issues we'd had on the bike. A great weekend was then rounded off by being presented with medals and most importantly a giant cheque for £2500 !

We must say a huge thank you to all our sponsors - Marin, Helly Hansen, Paramo, Nuun and For Goodness Shakes for helping us out this weekend enabling us to compete at such a high level. Also a huge thank you to John Laughlin who came along and managed us all weekend making sure we were always set and ready for every event.

Team Aberdeen Asset were Bruce Duncan, Tom Gibbs, Nick Gracie

