

Killamunda Challenge 2009



The 2009 Killamunda Challenge was held on Sunday 21 June, and 40 competitors lined up to tackle John Toomey's mind-bending Orienteering/Adventure Racing extravaganza.

You needed to screw your head on well before the start because there were plenty of sneaky tricks. The event started out on the Eastern border of John Forrest National Park and consisted of 4 exercises on foot connected by a mountain bike course vaguely following the Railway Reserve trail, finishing at the orienteering event at Ngangaguringguring.



The orienteering maps were handed out at the start of each exercise, but at registration we received two maps of the mountain bike course. One was a vague tourist map with the controls marked on it, and the other a detailed topographical map of the area with all the roads on it but no controls. The quick-thinking drew the controls onto the detailed map before the start – it sounds simple but saved a lot of confusion!

The start gun went off and we were away for “The Kick-Off”, a short scatter event where each control was worth points. We had to collect 200 points, but the numbers were only written on the controls, not the map! If you knew your soccer (and your flags!) you could pick the money controls - 2006 World Cup Quarter Finalists were worth 50 points each – but for the rest of us it was down to the headless chicken approach, running to controls at random.

Steve Fletcher came out of this exercise with a four minute lead over Wil and Jason, and was off at great speed down the railway trail. Wil and Jason pulled over a few km early- trying to navigate from the tourist map had not paid off! So I was able to catch them, and the three of us chased Fletch down. Fletch, meanwhile, had found that being at the front is not always the best idea – by the time he found the first control in the bushes, we had caught up and could follow him in. So it was a pace-line of four heading up the



railway trail, until we got separated by a fallen log. Luckily for me, the other three were pushed right and overshot the road leading into Lake Leschenaultia, while I managed to sneak up the pipeline to the control. Misreading the map, however, I threw my bike over the pipelines only to have to cross them again 500m later, much to the amusement of the officials at the transition area.

The second exercise was another scatter-type course. This time, each control had a code on matching a regional number plate, and we had to find the 5 controls (out of 10) which represented places south of Perth. Anyone who has ever been on a road trip with John and his favourite numberplate game was at a distinct advantage here! There was some argument later about whether MY really means Pinjarra, and whether G for Geraldton counted since the code is now 20 years out of date, but in the end the best technique was just to keep moving, and if you weren't sure, look for all the controls, which were not that far apart. I made a risky decision to do the exercise in bike shoes, but I saved enough time to maintain a five minute lead over Fletch and the others.



My plan for the event was to keep moving, and play it safe. Sticking to my plan obsessively, I threw my bike over the pipelines a third time, knowing I could find the railway trail again, rather than try to find a crossing point further East.

Another apparently silly but lucky decision, since a few teams riding East through the bush accidentally deviated North on the trail leading to the Lake – a significant detour!



The third exercise was a brilliantly tricky one – John had marked 10 controls on a 1:1000 scale aerial photograph of a gravel pit in Chidlow. It took some real concentration to work it out, and some tactics as well. The penalty for missing a control was only 3 minutes, so you had to be sure of finding each one in under 3 minutes to make it worthwhile. I found eight of them, discarding one on purpose and another because it was taking me too long to find. It must have been quite a sight later on, with bikes going in all directions in the gravel pit! I was still all alone at this stage, looking over my shoulder always expecting Fletch, Ricky and Wil to catch up.

After crossing Great Eastern Hwy I rode down Gorrie Rd and along the powerline track – there was a flatter route choice but sticking to my “playing it safe” plan I took on the soft gravelly hill, cursing my plan. It worked though, I confidently found the last control and powered on to the orienteering event, wondering if I still had the lead, and whether I could get through the orienteering course without my brain exploding from too much unaccustomed clear thinking.

Karen's orienteering course was beautifully set, with just enough navigation to make it a challenge, but easier than an H course, to allow the back end of the field (and me!) to

finish it relatively smoothly. One of the controls had a cheerful balloon attached to it which had somehow survived the storms the night before.

After all that it was time for a lot of food and recovery, an enjoyable afternoon hearing all the other stories from the day, and then some fun control collecting later on.

All in all it was a fantastic event and hugely enjoyed by all, from Fletch at the front of the field, to the teams who had never orienteered before but loved the day. Many thanks to John for setting all the different courses with such a lot of imagination and hard work, and to all the other helpers: Karen, Ian, Paul, Tim, Helen and Richard. I am looking forward to seeing what next year's Killamunda brings!

Jen Graham-Taylor