

## **PREPARING FOR XPD**

### **GETTING THE BEST OUT OF YOUR TEAM**

**BY GREG TOMAN (Grad. Dip. Outdoor Education)**

**Competitor in XPD 04, 06, 07, 08**

XPD is an event that has the ability to bring out the best and worst in people. Having completed the four XPD events to date, I have witnessed and experienced many of the highs and lows that come with an event of this length and difficulty.

In particular, I have witnessed teams explode, implode, dissolve as well as bond, unify and succeed. Entering an event like XPD is a huge commitment in time, effort and money as well as a potential burden on family, friends and relationships. For these reasons it is imperative that you enter this event in the right mindset and approach it in a professional / businesslike manner so that your commitment and sacrifices are not for naught.



Apart from your biggest challenge being to get a full team to the starting line, the next biggest challenge is to get the full team to the finish line. Here is a break-down of team numbers, Unranked Teams (UR) and teams that Did Not Finish (DNF):

#### ***XPD 04 Broken Hill***

- 20 Teams in total
- 3 Teams Unranked
- 3 Teams did not finish

#### ***XPD 07 Whitsundays***

- 78 Teams in total
- 17 Teams Unranked
- 4 Teams did not finish

#### ***XPD 06 Tasmania***

- 50 Teams in total
- 10 Teams Unranked
- 1 Teams did not finish

#### ***XPD 08 Australian Alps***

- 31 Teams in total
- 9 Teams Unranked
- 4 Teams did not finish

The underlying reason for many of the unranked teams is an injury / illness to one or more of the team. Some of these could possibly be prevented with better planning, preparation, decision making and monitoring of the teams wellbeing, while others were just due to plain bad luck.

One of the other reasons for unranked and DNF teams is team dynamics, disparities between personal and team goals, imbalance in teams members' skill and fitness levels and their inability to effectively problem solve and handle stress.

Also be aware of the 48 hour and mid-camp pull-out syndrome. Most competitors new to XPD would have only experienced a 24hour to 48 hour AR event leading into this race. Mental strength and determination is required to keep going past this point knowing that you may have up to 7 more days of racing to complete the course. It is at this point that you are physically sore and fatigued and sleep deprived. You may start to look ahead at what is still in store for you and your team and start to doubt your ability to complete the race. It is at this point that you look for reasons to pull out and people do. Don't pull out!...break the race down into smaller achievable sections and forget the rest. Just concentrate on the achievable section and succeed in completing it, then identify the next section and so on.

The mid-camp syndrome is easy to fall into and it is important for the team to stay close and remain focused and motivated on completing the course. It is an easy and convenient location for a team member to opt out of the race...and they do! Make a commitment not to pull out at mid-camp, get your whole team back out on the course and you will find things will fall back into place and you will regain your rhythm.



Forming a team for XPD is not an easy task and will take some time to recruit, test drive and finalise team members. Even after going through this process, your good work may be turned upside down with last minute injuries / illnesses / work & family commitments. For example: XPD 04 one of our original team members withdrew due to a chronic foot injury and pending operation. XPD 06 a team member withdrew two weeks out due to suffering from severe shingles. XPD 08 a team member withdrew three months out due to a chronic knee injury. It pays to have one or more people on the reserve bench who train with the team.

### Things to consider when forming a team for XPD:

#### ***Team Goals***

Your team goals must be clearly outlined and each team member must agree to them. Each team member must be able to perform in such a way as to achieve these goals, taking into consideration everyone's strengths and weaknesses.

Beware of over-achievers becoming frustrated, angry and pushy. Beware of under-achievers becoming demoralised, isolated and de-motivated. To minimise potential team dynamic problems, consider the following:

#### ***Clearly outline your team goal (e.g.)***

- To finish (ranked or unranked)
- Finish within a specified timeframe (e.g. within 7 days)
- Finish in the top five places in your category and/or overall
- To podium

#### ***Team Strategies***

It is critical to identify:

- Each team member's responsibilities / tasks before the race, at the race and after the race?
- When, where and how long the team will sleep?
- When, where and what will the team will eat (main meals etc)?
- Who is responsible for carrying specific "team" gear?
- Will there be a lead navigator ... if so, who will lead each discipline?
- How will the team prevent or diffuse personal issues / problems during the race?
- Race pace for each discipline

#### ***Teamwork***

- You must think as a team, think for the team and work as a team
- Looking after your own back will not get the team across the line
- Everyone will hit a 'low point' or a 'flat spot' at different times in the race – work through these as a team

## ***Injury / Illness and the Team***

It will help to look at a number of possible situations that may arise during the race and formulate a strategy to manage these before the race. For example what will the team or team members do if the following occurred?

- One team member falls ill or incurs an injury that dramatically slows down the team or forces them to stop for a significant period. Will you off-load them and continue unranked but try to finish the race in a good time...stick with them until they feel better to move on, slow the pace, carry some of their gear until they recover...or all pull out.
- One team member is forced to withdraw from the race. Does the team continue on unranked...pull out together...let another person join the team and continue unranked. Think about paddling as three!
- Two team members withdraw...will the remaining two members look to join up with another unranked team to continue on.



## ***Conflict***

This is an area that is not generally addressed by teams prior to racing and as such it has led to some team members not talking to each other throughout the event or after they finish and some teams have DNF or finished unranked as a result.

XPD will give you an opportunity to find out more about yourself and your team members, it can be a very positive experience and one that will stay with you for a long time.

Think about employing some of these strategies:

- Train with your team regularly and address any issues as a team early on
- Do some sessions that go through the night (e.g. start at 12 noon and finish the next day at Noon) and see how people operate when physically tired and sleep deprived. Learn when to give people some space and when to encourage and support them
- Make sure everyone shares the workload and that the jobs are completed on time
- Set rules and guidelines by which the team will operate and when necessary refer the team back to these when any issues arise. This way it does not become personal and each team member had agreed in advance to working within these rules and guidelines.
- Come up with a funny word or saying that anyone in the team can call out if they believe that a conflict situation is approaching. When the team hears this word they should all become aware of what is happening and "step back" and regroup.

## **Still to come; advice, tips and thoughts on...**

- ◆ **Sleep deprivation**
- ◆ **Training for XPD**
- ◆ **Food and hydration**
- ◆ **Equipment selection**
- ◆ **Navigation and Map Prep tips**
- ◆ **Bike section tips**
- ◆ **Paddling section tips**
- ◆ **Trekking section tips**
- ◆ **Foot care**

Is there something you would like more information on? Email: [greg@area51.net.au](mailto:greg@area51.net.au)

<http://www.area51.net.au>