

Can Dreams come True Twice?

A recollection of the 2023 World Rogaining Championships by Abigail George, Joanna George and Meredith Norman.

Winning the World Rogaining Championships was a dream come true, when we won the Women's Youth Category at the World Rogaining Championships in the Czech Republic in July 2022. We felt so proud to have won this event for Australia against a strong European contingent and we were immensely grateful for all the Australian support. Now, four months on, it was a warm summers evening and we were reminiscing about the rogaining adventure. We decided to see when the next World Rogaining Championships would be held – California in July 2023. Surely we couldn't win this twice we thought. Dreams might come true once if you are lucky, but surely not twice. No one had ever even won the Women's Youth Category twice before. Intrigued and filled with motivation, we were so delighted and grateful to receive funding from the Nigel Aylott memorial fund which made representing Australia at the 2023 World Rogaining Championships possible. It felt extra special knowing that Nigel Aylott had competed in an adventure race in 2003 in the Lake Tahoe Region, the same area where the World Rogaining Championships would be held. We really were following in his adventurous footsteps!

The next few months were filled with training and preparations for the rogain. We did a gruelling 7pm – 7am over night hike and competed in a few local South Australian Rogaining events. This was supplemented with many early morning runs and orienteering events for navigation practice. It was a challenge balancing university studies and work with the training load but we were all filled with motivation

After a long flight from Australia, including a 16hr flight from Singapore to San Francisco, we arrived in the USA. We ordered an Uber to our San Francisco accommodation and were most surprised when a Tesla came and picked us up. The driver even put our camping bag in the 'frunk', the front trunk. We then went on to spend the fortnight sightseeing, acclimatising to the elevation and preparing for the rogain.



Navigation practice on the model map.

The final few nights before the rogaine were spent at South Lake Tahoe. We heard many rumours of bear sightings around the Lake Tahoe area, so we opted to buy a tin of bear spray. It was pricey, costing \$100 AUD. We nominated Joanna to carry the trusty bear spray, although we truly hoped we wouldn't have to use it.

The morning of the rogaine we woke up to a bear prowling around our accommodation. We felt excited to finally see a bear.



The bear outside our accommodation.

We arrived at the Hash House at 8:30am and queued up to be one of the first teams to receive maps. Planning was a challenge given the many hills, distribution of points and changing vegetation. We had discussions in the months prior to the rogaine with Paul Hoopmann, Julie Quinn and David Baldwin about vegetation and overall planning techniques. This helped us rule out some potential routes. Planning took around two hours which was longer than we have taken in the past – definitely a world class rogaine! After much deliberation we had a planned an 85km loop with many options to add on or shorten our loop. We headed off to the non-iced, ice-arena to start. It was surreal being surrounded by competitors from all over the world.



Planning our route.

The rogaie started with a steep climb up a ski slope to the first control. The initial climb was tough, making us appreciate that our route choice went around most of the climb at the start. Most other teams' routes went up to the top of the hill at the start so for the next couple controls we were mainly walking by ourselves.

Our first mistake was at control 58. Our plan was to walk to the track junction near the control and take a bearing in, however the track junction was hard to spot, and we ended up walking about 5 minutes too far up the track. We realised our error as the track started to climb a lot and point the wrong direction. We headed back and found the indistinct track junction leading us to the control.

The next ten controls were flat, enjoyable and highly visible. On our way to control 65 we saw Australians Julie Quinn and David Baldwin. It was motivating seeing them running briskly through the terrain. We filled up with water at control 25 and ate some peanut butter Cliff Bars.

Our goal was to hit 81 by night time as this would mean most of the harder controls in the top left area would be completed before nightfall. We were super happy we were moving fast and made it to 81 before dark! We then started to climb the big ski hill in the middle of the map, this is where we found that ski slopes weren't the best to walk up as they were covered in thick small bushes. For the next few controls on the hill we adjusted our route choice and did our best to avoid the ski slopes.

On our way to control 43 we heard some faint growling noises and heavy breathing. Joanna got the bear spray out and held it firmly ready for defence. We picked the pace up as none of us wanted to become a bear's dinner! We noticed bear footprints throughout the forest. Before the rogaie we had discussed our plan to take on a bear, so we were prepared.

At 3:30am we were walking down a dirt road and a car was driving towards us and stopped. It was the local sheriff investigating reported lights in the forest and thought it could be a plane crash. We explained what rogaing was and he was a bit confused but accepted it.

We crossed the compulsory highway crossing at 21 and finally it was light! We were all very happy that the night was over. Our legs were starting to feel very tired at sunrise but the motivation that we were almost done kept us going. After control 32 we headed to control 34. After around 300 metres of walking through extremely scratchy and thick undergrowth, we determined it was too slow to proceed on this route so headed via the track to 51. We were planning on crossing the creek between control 51 and 47 via the marked track crossing, however we struggled to find the track. The entire creek besides the crossings

were marked as out of bounds so we were very conscious about not accidentally taking a wrong track. After about 30 minutes looking for the path, we took the longer route around to the obvious bridge where we were sure it was not out bounds.

After 47 we jogged to 48, 68 and then to 97 gaining some time. We headed back to the compulsory crossing and deliberated how many controls to add on in to maximise our score. Control 27 to 30 was slow going along the rocky and vegetated spur. We picked up the pace and ran to 39 and 38. The last kilometre back to the hash house was steep and we were filled with feelings of a mix of pain and joy that we had survived the rogaine. We arrived at the hash house 19 minutes early and felt satisfied with our effort.

We were so thrilled to win the Women's Youth Category for Australia for the second year in a row. It felt very special to be the first team to ever win this category twice. We couldn't have done it without the support from the Nigel Aylott Memorial Fund, Rogaining Australia and Rogaining South Australia. Further thanks for the support from friends and family who supported us in our rogaine journey leading up to the event. It was so incredible rogaining together in California, this will be forever a special memory. We are so excited for future rogaines together as the Dream Team who proved that dreams really do come true!



2023 Women's Youth World Rogaining Champions