

Adventure out

CHOOSE YOUR own adventure

Since the 1990s, adventure racing has taken off around the world with participants swimming, mountain biking, trail running and paddling in picturesque locations in national and regional parks. Accomplished athlete Morgan Marsh took part in the Eagle Bay Epic Adventure Race to find out if her years participating in triathlons and ironman events would hold her in good stead competing in the rugged outdoors.

by Morgan Marsh





As a tried and true Type A triathlete, it is always a bit of a challenge to step out of my comfort zone and try something different. But 2020 certainly pushed us all out of our comfort zone, so why not extend that even further? Enter - the inaugural Eagle Bay Epic Adventure Race.

With only five weeks before race day, I signed up. Given I hadn't been on my mountain bike since I completed the Cape to Cape Mountain Bike Race in 2017, nor attempted to paddle for almost two years, I wisely, albeit uncharacteristically, chose to participate in the entry level short course.

The short course consisted of a 13-kilometre mountain bike leg from the scenic Eagle Bay Brewery through the flowing trails in Dunsborough to the crystal blue waters edge of Dunn Bay, then a 1.2-kilometre ocean swim, followed by a five-kilometre paddle and finishing with an eight-kilometre trail run through the gorgeous Meelup Regional Park.

My trepidation was quickly brushed aside, along with the dust on the bike and ski, as I set about preparing for the event.

THE LOW DOWN

The origins of adventure racing are the topic of some debate. Some say adventure racing began in New Zealand in 1980 with the Alpine Ironman where competitors ran, paddled and skied their way to the finish line. Others say the Coast to Coast race that followed in 1983, which runs from the west to the east coast of New Zealand's South Island, was the true

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Top Swimmers enter the water at Meelup Regional Park – host location of the Eagle Bay Epic Adventure Race.

Above Paddling ski leg.

Inset from left The challenging bike course through rough tracks; Racing is open to all ages and abilities; Completing the beach sand run.
Photos – Focused Ninja Photography



beginning of adventure racing since it involved running, cycling and paddling elements.

Either way, these events prompted the world to take notice and adventure racing really started to take off in the 1990s.

Much like a triathlon, adventure racing is broken into stages and the vast majority of adventure races include a minimum of trail running, mountain biking and a paddling event. Each stage begins and ends with a transition area and the longer races require some level of navigation skills due to their distance and duration.

Sprint races are ideal for beginners. They generally take three to six hours and be completed as a team, with different members completing each leg of the race. At the other end of the field are expedition races that can take up to ten days of non-stop adventuring and navigating through the wilderness.

SADDLE UP

Race day dawns warm with clear skies and a slight wind. After years of triathlons starting at the crack of dawn, I struggled to process this leisurely 10:30am start time. Wait, you mean I have time to get a coffee? I have time for a real breakfast? Oh, I could get used to this!

Triathlons are very ordered and organised. On race day it became clear that perhaps adventure racing is a little more laid back. I quickly realised I may have to just relax, go with the flow, and let go of any expectations.

We all pack into the starting corral and, as the starter gun goes, everyone sprints the 300 metres to their bikes. Being



Do it yourself

There are plenty of websites that list adventure races in Western Australia and will help you find the event that's right for you.

Some examples are:

- multisportaustralia.com.au
- adventurerace.com.au
- adventurethon.com.au
- adventurejunkie.com.au



Choose your own adventure

- **Sprint races:** generally in the three to six hour range, these races are ideal for beginners while serving as good preparation and training for more experienced racers.
- **One-day adventure races:** for the majority of more seasoned racers, 12 and 24-hour races are the popular and most sought-out races each year.
- **Multi-day races:** some consider anything over 30 hours to be an 'expedition race', but two-to-three day races are more of a bridge to a true expedition race than anything else.
- **Expedition races:** four-to-ten day, non-stop wilderness race. Truly more of an expedition than a race, these events are the pinnacle of the sport.



conservative I managed to avoid a few stacks and sudden stopping as we tackled the various obstacles. The single track was fast flowing and not as technical as I feared. It was awesome.

I came into transition, grabbed the cap and goggles and headed out for the swim. I slowed to a walk as I waded in gingerly, trying to avoid the seagrass and rocks, eventually having enough depth to start swimming. The water was crystal clear and absolutely stunning. No wetsuit required, no stingers, just clear, flat beautiful ocean.

THE HOME STRETCH

After happily overtaking a few people, I made my way out of the swim. As I walked through the seagrass once again someone kindly mentioned 'I hope there are no cobblers' ... um, thanks for that! I headed to the paddle transition and was happy to see my ski was where I left it.

I have never been so appreciative of my stable ski as people were falling out of theirs left, right and centre. Luckily, I remained dry and had the benefit of a bit of wind and wave assistance to help me along the back straight back into transition.

Now onto the run. Well, 'run' might be a generous description of my activity at this point. It was more a trudge as I made

my way along the beach through the soft sand and then onto the rocks. Sprightly kids buzzed past me like little mountain goats over the slippery and unstable rocks as I carefully chose my path, desperate to keep to my goal of remaining upright and uninjured.

I made it unscathed onto the trails along the coastline of the Meelup Regional Park. The trail was phenomenal! The view across the ocean had to be appreciated even if it meant risking taking your eyes off your feet even just for a moment. After surviving the final uphill challenge, I found enough energy for a sprint finish with a huge sense of satisfaction that I had managed to achieve my goal of staying upright, happy and whole!

THE VERDICT

After years of triathlons and all manner of multi-sport combinations, it's fair to say that although adventure racing involves similar outdoor disciplines of running, swimming and cycling, there is something really special about getting to do all those things so much closer to nature.

We are so lucky in Western Australia to have such pristine national parks, regional parks and coastline not to mention the ability to participate in adventure races with such a backdrop.

It is worth acknowledging the value of these things; not to mention the fun of starting and finishing at a brewery!

Above left A 'Le mans' start with bikes laid down in long rows.

Above Running to the paddle transition.

Below Arriving at the race.
Photos – Focused Ninja Photography



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