

Susan William's Hawkesbury Canoe Classic 2018

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Hawkesbury Canoe Race, October 27-28, 2018, Windsor to Brooklyn (just north of Sydney), New South Wales, Australia. 111 Kilometers, non-stop, all night long.

The Hawkesbury is Australia's longest non-stop canoe race, raising money for the Arrow Bone Marrow Transplant Foundation. Over the years they've raised almost four million dollars for leukemia research.

When Tony told me we'd be doing the Hawkesbury Classic less than a week after I landed in Australia, I quickly did the math and thought, no big deal, 111 kilometers is about 70 miles and I've done 70 miles a lot of times non-stop. Heck, I've done the 70-mile General Clinton 3 times solo and 5 times tandem. I've done the 90-Miler 10 times including once solo. I've done the 90-mile Cannonball with 13.1 miles of portages in the dark, I've done 120 miles non-stop in the AuSable River Canoe Marathon at night, and I finished the 200 kilometer Muskoka River X in Ontario, Canada, at night, with 20 portages, after breaking my wrist at portage number 16. If I can do that, then surely 111 kilometers at night on the Hawkesbury would be no big deal, especially since jet lag would work in my favor and I'd be wide awake in the middle of the night. After all, 3 AM on the Hawkesbury is noon time to my body.

I should know by now to never say something is going to be "no big deal." Enter the high winds, rain, big waves, jellyfish, sharks, darkness, tide changes, and Australian biting spiders. But first, the beginning.

It's about 9 or 10 hours from Echuca to Sydney, and I was in Tony's Jeep with Raaahd Clark and Barry Bell, the 3 amigos who keep any trip entertaining with bawdy stories and stops at every Maccas (MacDonald's) that can be found along the way. We also stopped at the Dog on the Tucker Box, which is a whole story on its own (google it). Raaahd even sang the song. A spirited discussion was also had about the merits of saying al-you-min-ee-um versus ah-loom-inn-numb and Raaahd accused me of not knowing how to speak English.

The Blue Mountains are gorgeous, I know that from when Peggy and I toured them last year, but I slept through them this time, a consequence of jet lag and my opinion that, even though 111 kilometers at night was going to be "no big deal", a good dose of sleep the day before wouldn't hurt anyway.

We spent the night at a gorgeous B&B and had a generous hot breakfast before heading off to the Hawkesbury start line. It seemed to me that arriving at a start line at 9:00 AM for a race that started at 5 PM was a bit extreme, but hey, not my country and I'm just following directions here.

We parked under a big tree, unloaded boats, emptied Tony's teardrop trailer to be ready for our afternoon nap, finalized our registration, had our boat inspected ("scruiteeneered" in Australia), had our PFDs scruiteeneered, socialized with everyone I hadn't seen since last year, met some new people I was looking forward to meeting, and just about then I began to see why it was so important to get to the race site at 9 AM.

Australian sun is hot. Really hot. So hot that it melted the duct tape that was holding my protein bar onto the boat gunnel a mere 15 minutes after I taped it there. I didn't even know duct tape could melt. I could feel through the package that my bar was now liquid. By 10:30 there were no shade trees left. We made sure the boats were in the shade, the Jeep and trailer were shaded, we were shaded, and it was quite pleasant under our tree with a nice breeze.

I slept on and off all morning and afternoon until Tony woke me up to go get something to eat and a massage. Massage therapy students were there as part of their class. This race was looking better all the time. A nice day outside in the shade, a grilled sausage ("snag" in Australia) sandwich, and a massage. Who wouldn't want to do the Hawkesbury?!

The mandatory pre-race meeting was at 3:00 and the announcer said several times that if you go under any bridges before the finish bridge then you have gone the wrong way. Everyone said it's super easy to get lost on the Hawkesbury.

Oh, did I forget to mention that, unlike the AuSable, the Cannonball, and the MRX, lights are strictly prohibited here?

Yes, you read that right, lights are not allowed. You are paddling at night, in the deep dark of the Australian bush, with nothing but your night vision to see with. You must have an emergency light in the boat, but you are not allowed to use it unless it's a real emergency. You will be disqualified if you turn on a light to see during the Hawkesbury.

Soon enough it was 4:30, time for us to marshal up for final inspection and get on the water for our 4:45 pm start. The scrutineers looked at the boat for our food, water, emergency light, and paddles, and inspected our PFDs for the mandatory emergency blanket, small waterproof flashlight ("torch" in Australia), and our whistles. They then allowed us to go directly to the water and get on the start line.

It's a very civilized start. You line up at the blue flag, and then a man on the bank walks the blue flag downstream and you follow him in an orderly line until you get to the red flag. It stops people from jumping the line. Here everyone holds the boats for a few seconds until the starter says "Go." Thus ends the civility and it's a

free for all for about 500 meters until things sort themselves out and people settle down. Tony and I started far right, in clear water, and we started at our all-night race pace, not some silly sprint start that we wouldn't maintain for 111 kilometers. It wasn't but only 2 miles later when we passed lots of boats that went way too fast out of the start.

Early on we rounded a corner, I was admiring the scenery, and there was a photographer in the middle of the river, up to his chest, just smiling ear to ear, greeting everyone, and happily taking photo after photo. He might have been the most cheerful photographer I've ever seen. I thought, this has got to be the nicest race ever. Snags, a massage, a nifty civilized start, a cool photographer, the Hawkesbury was turning out to be pretty awesome.



Above: Cheerful photographer gets a snap!

Aaaaaaand then it got dark. Did I mention lights were prohibited? Yea. And, for the record, the middle of the bush in Australia is frickin' dark. The race organizers tape glow sticks to the front and back of each boat. I'm not sure why they do this because you can't see the canoes ahead of you if they're more than 50 yards away. It must be that the checkpoint boats, which are fairly large power boats, can see them from their higher vantage point.

There are many check points on the Hawkesbury, I think they go A through P. Some are on the water, and you paddle by a power boat and yell your boat number, and some are on land. You don't have to get out on land, you just have to get close enough that they can hear you shout your number. Two of the checkpoints have in and out routes, and you have to check in and also yell when you go out, failure to check in both places is a 15 minute penalty. To find a checkpoint, you look for yellow flashing lights and a slower and less frequently flashing white letter. They're not hard to spot, however several of them are on the opposite side of the river from where you want to be, particularly when low tide hits.

As dark of night fell, the drunks on shore were initially funny, but they lack appreciation for night vision. Or maybe they do appreciate it, which is why they shine spotlights into your face. Either way, it's blinding and it seriously affects your sight. With no lights allowed on the boat to help you see, keeping your vision night worthy becomes extremely important. One drunk at a camp ground ("caravan park" in Australia), actually got in his car, drove down the side of the river, and held the spotlight directly on us for at least 2 kilometers. Our names are printed in big letters on the side of the boat and, because lights are prohibited, I wore a white shirt, thinking that if they needed to find the body at any point, I'd be easier to see. It would be considered a huge faux pas to wear white or anything reflective in the AuSable, but when you're not worried about reflecting off someone's light, white works just fine. Until a redneck ("bogan") decides to aim a spotlight at you for 2 kilometers while drunkenly

screaming your name at midnight. Then every stroke is blinding as the light reflecting off the white shirt hurts your eyes. Tony said, "Don't say anything to them, if you do, they might throw rocks at you." Ok, paddle on then.

There are 3 tide changes during the race, and our GPS speed monitor shows exactly when the tide was at its worst. We started on an outgoing tide and hit 10 km an hour fairly routinely. Then came the incoming tide and my morale went low knowing that we would have 6 hours of a slog. Even though we were going downstream with the current toward the ocean, in reality we were not. The incoming tide was so strong that we hugged the shores for 6 hours finding every eddy we could find so that we weren't paddling against the current. Our speed gradually slowed to 6.5 km an hour. You could see the incoming current ripping upstream in the center of the river.

The racing kayaks started 15 minutes behind us and it was a pretty sight every time a pack of them came by us. I started as a kayaker and I still love it the most. And when I see big packs of K1s and K2s drafting as they come by, I really miss it. Everyone is friendly in this race. I think some of the people just liked to hear my American accent. As soon as some of them saw "Susan" and the American flag on the side of the boat, especially the younger people, they would always ask a few questions. It kept everyone busy and cut down on the monotony of knowing you had hours of going against a strong tide, and it was a little break from staring at the tree tops for an indication of which way the river was turning.

At one point there was a commotion ahead. A pack of kayaks was stopped in the middle of the river and we could hear that something not good was going on. Then a flash of light appeared and reflected back a huge dock that jutted out half way across the water, with the top of it right at face level. I believe that was definitely a proper use of the emergency lights we all had to carry. I think the lead kayak hit one of the many pylons holding up the dock, or nearly did, and we felt lucky the kayakers had gotten ahead of us because the dock was well and truly invisible against the black water and the black background of the mountain ahead of us. We took a wide path around it as the kayaks came out and around too. It seemed they were all ok as they packed up again and carried on.

As we rounded a corner around a particularly tall and steep mountain, I saw one of the most striking sights I think I've ever seen in night racing. The full moon was big, bright, and glorious as it rose above the mountain. It was so big, so bright, and so beautiful that it seemed as if you could just reach up and touch it. The stars were amazing, and there were so many of them. The sky was lit up more beautifully than I've seen it in a very long time. Tony said that in the Australian bush there aren't any other lights to interfere, and that's why everything is so clear and bright in the sky. It looked like a million sparkling diamonds twinkling around a giant glowing pearl.

I wondered what time it was. I figured it was past midnight, given that the drunks seemed to be all asleep by now. There was no wind, no sound, no ripples on the water, just my voice Hut Hut Hut the call to switch sides in the darkness.

The sky was gradually clouding over. We knew it was going to rain at some point, and we were supposed to get some strong winds. But not now. Now was just quite, still, and glorious to see the cliffs, the mountains, and the trees among the stars and the full moon, the moon slowly being eclipsed by the wispy clouds coming in. I wondered what it would be like to try to see with no light when the clouds became solid.

Suddenly my head jarred awake. Had I fallen asleep just then? It was so quiet, so smooth, so incredibly surreal to be paddling where I was, in the black darkness of Australia, that I found myself now struggling to stay awake. I started calling huts on stroke 6 instead of 7, then in a few minutes it was 5 instead of 6. I hoped that changing sides more frequently would keep me awake. Was it really possible to fall asleep in the canoe? I didn't really want to find out but I was sure the answer was yes. I truly was nodding off.

Now what? Tony is not a talker in the boat, and I can't hear him well anyway. I focused on the tops of the trees to see which way the river would turn, I admired the cliffs and the stillness of the water, and I wished for something to wake me up. Then I took back that wish because I know I should be careful for what I wish for. I fought the urge to sleep while imagining how beautiful it must be to paddle in this valley during the day. In the darkness I heard Tony's voice, "After the next checkpoint, the one after that will be the 66 kilometer mark."

"66 kilometers next checkpoint" I echoed back, having learned early on that's what I needed to do to make sure of two things, first to let Tony know that I heard him, and second to make sure I heard him correctly. 66 kilometres, I thought, you've got to be kidding me. This was such a slog with hours of the incoming tide against us, and we've not yet gone 66 kilometres?! How much more of this have we got left?

My math skills have never been the sharpest in the box, but on the Hawkesbury at that hour of the night, fighting sleep in the canoe, trying to focus on where I was going, where the next corner was in the dark, I was sorely struggling to subtract 66 from 111. This is what my mind was doing, "66, 76, 86, 96, 206, no that's not right. 66, 76, 86, 96, 106, that's it. Oh, I better call a hut. HUT. 66, 76, 86, 96, 106, 116, that's too much. HUT. 66, 76, 86, 96, 106. HUT. Ok, what's from 106 to 111? HUT. 66, 76, 10, 76, 86, 20, 86, 96, 30 HUT 96, 106, 40. Oh. My. God. There are 40 some kilometers left. HUT. 40 what? 45? Let's just call it 45. HUT. What is 111 minus 106? HUT. There are 45 kilometers left. HUT. How many hours is that? 5? HUT. Five hours left." I had no idea what a toll it would take on mind and body to race without a light and five more hours seemed like forever.

Marker 66 was interesting. Lots of people were getting out there. There is a shorter race within the Hawkesbury that ends there. Lots of activity to look at. I just yelled our number and we kept going. Tony had told me at the start that we were not stopping anywhere for any reason, and so we didn't. Barry, our intrepid pit crew, yelled loudly to us from shore, that the ferry ahead was stuck, the cable broke, so we had to go through the blue gate.

I had no idea what it all meant but I figured I would find out shortly. Sure enough, I saw two blue lights on the far side of the river. There was a police boat in the middle of the river and the policeman yelled that we had to go



around the blue lights because they were trying to fix the cable on the disabled ferry. There are four ferries during the race, and for each one we had to carefully obey the police officers. The ferries are pulled across the river on cables, and you can't take a canoe over the cable or your boat could be overturned, cut in half, or worse, you could be decapitated. When the ferry is crossing, you must stop and wait for it. We were fortunate, we didn't have to stop at all for two of them, and for the other two we had to stop for maybe 30 seconds each.

Above: Lookout above Marker 66 at dusk, many hours earlier

Once we crossed over the cable, Tony said we would be turning right. It sure didn't look like we had anywhere to turn right, but this was Tony's 27th time on the Hawkesbury so I had no reason to doubt him. There were several boats going left, and Tony said they were going to be lost and they would find a bridge eventually and that's how they would know they had to turn around. I sure could see why people would get lost here. It looked like two places to go left and no places to go right.

The right turn was virtually hidden, and it was the first of many hidden spots where we had a group of people follow us through. This time there were two kayaks who didn't know where they were going and followed us into the dark narrow opening in the river.

Here was the fourth and last ferry, the police told us to stop, and a group of maybe a dozen boats accumulated for the few seconds we had to wait. It was nice to see other paddlers around us again. Spirits were higher for everyone now that we had a small group together. Somehow it's easier to paddle in the dark when you know others are there, even if you can't see them very well. Everyone was so happy to greet another boat as they went by.

I think the most cheerful boat of all was the rabaska. There were 10 paddlers in that boat. We could hear them coming for a long time. They cheered for everyone, occasionally they sang, and it seemed like they were all having a great time. When they came by I said "Hey Rabaska, I've paddled one of those before in Canada." They thought that was pretty cool. It looked like all young people in the boat from what was possible to see in the dark. They were searching for a place to pull over. You have to be careful where you pull over on the Hawkesbury, Tony and several others warned me that you could very easily step out and sink into mud right up to your neck "and that would be the end of ya."

We rounded a few more corners and the wind hit. Strong wind. This was not a good sign. The final 11 kilometers of the race is in open water, big open water, and a strong wind this far inland was not a good sign for the finish, it would mean big waves, and I don't like big waves in a canoe.

It also got cold. I felt a little cold but not much, more like I noticed it had gotten cold but it wasn't bothering me. I felt just right with two shirts and the PFD on. PFDs are mandatory in Australia. I was glad to have one on, even if just to keep warm.

We came through a few more spots where people were lost, each time we could see them sitting and waiting for someone to come along. We passed a checkpoint and saw a paddler way off to the right, clearly searching for the way. When he saw us, he picked up his pace and came straight to us, asking if we knew where to go. "This way," I said, as if I had any idea, but I knew the man in my bow certainly knew. Tony seemed to find the openings in the trees so easily. Tony had a GPS, but he had it set to only show us if the upcoming turns were right or left, it was just a pink line on the screen. He doesn't use it for anything else.

The scenery on the Hawkesbury has to be gorgeous. I could see the outlines of sheer cliffs, lots of caves at the water line, and tall mountains. When we'd get close to the cliffs, it seemed that they were layered and striated, it would be so cool to see them during the day.

With several paddlers following us again because Tony knew the way, we made what I think was the longest left turn I've ever made. It never seemed to end. It was so dark that I couldn't precisely tell, but it must have been a big sloping ox bow in the river. I could see the tree line but it was giving me an optical illusion. I kept thinking the trees were overhanging the water, but when I got to them, there was no overhang, the overhang had moved down the river. It did this 4 or 5 times, I kept seeing an imaginary tree over hanging the river, and the tree kept moving down the river. This is not the first time I experienced mind tricks or little hallucinations on a river during a long night. I once saw a gator on the northern Michigan AuSable (it was a log), and I saw big dinosaurs on Ontario's Muskoka River X (they were trees). A few imaginary overhanging trees seemed merely amusing on the Hawkesbury.

I wasn't so amused however when we smacked right into some tall reeds growing in the river. I didn't see them and Tony didn't either. A couple of reeds smacked me in the face as I heard them scrape down the side of the boat. The initial sound just about had me jumping through my skin. While looking toward the left, to see how far out from shore the reeds went, out of the periphery of my right eye I saw something drop onto my right leg. It felt round and heavy and about as big as the palm of my hand. It also felt like it might have 8 legs. Yes indeed it did have 8 legs and they were gripping with a bit of a pinch into my paddling pants.

Oh boy. Now what? I was afraid to take my hand and try to brush it off my thigh, for fear that I would agitate it and it would bite me in my hand or crawl up my arm toward my head and neck. What do I know about wildlife in the bush except that most things in Australia will kill you. I couldn't see what it was in the dark, not enough to identify it anyway. It seemed content to just sit on my leg. So it was going to sit there for as long as it wanted. I had no idea what I was going to do other than not touch it and hope to God it didn't move. I had a moment where I laughed thinking that if this was Peggy she would have run on top of the water and been in Sydney by now.

I briefly contemplated finding my emergency flashlight and taking a look at it. But to do that I was going to have to move around too much and probably make it move too. The last thing I wanted was to have some unknown potentially deadly 8 legged thing become angry, move, and then be unable to see or find it in the boat under me. I thought I felt it move a bit. Yep, the pinching from those 8 legs had indeed moved. I briefly contemplated jumping out of the boat but then remembered the neck deep mud. It moved again. And then it bit me.

"OW," I yelled loudly, slightly alarmed, "Something is biting me!" "You'll be alright," was the calm Australian accented reply from the bow. I moved my leg and grabbed my pants and pulled them out and let them snap back, hoping that it would dislodge whatever was there. "OW! It's biting me again!" I yelled. "You'll be all right," came the calm voice from the bow again as I pressed my leg into the seat, hopefully squishing and killing whatever had bitten me. Given that there were no more bites, I sincerely hoped I had killed it and not just knocked it into the bottom of the boat or under the seat where it was waiting to strike again.

Oh my God, I thought, what are the symptoms of a poisonous spider bite? How soon does venom take effect? Is my leg numb because I've been sitting in a canoe for 10 hours or because poison is pulsing through my body? Check your other leg Susan, oh good, it's numb too. Ok, I feel a little light headed. Is it because I'm sleep deprived, need some nutrition and hydration, and am mentally exhausted from trying to navigate down a foreign river with no light in the dark or because the venom is working? Take a drink, look up at the tree line, ok, I'm ok, adrenaline works against venom, right, or is that just what they give people with allergies? Breathe Susan breathe. Oh, maybe I was lightheaded because I was holding my breath.

I didn't have a whole lot of time to think about whether or not I was going to die from a spider bite, because we rounded a corner into a blasting headwind. In the moonlight I could see the whitecaps. We had reached the beginning of the open water. Tony yelled, "Do you see the checkpoint up there?" "Checkpoint up there," I replied. "Head toward the checkpoint," he yelled. "Straight to the checkpoint," I yelled back.

The boat was crashing over whitecaps and water was flooding into the boat. We had a bow deck cover on, knowing the possibility of rough water, but it wasn't sufficient to keep the waves from pouring in. Tony yelled something, but the howl of the wind and the crashing of the water made it impossible to hear what he said. "I can't hear you," I yelled.

Tony doesn't swear. He doesn't believe in swearing and doesn't like it. Tony said a swear word. Well, he yelled a swear word really loudly, and not only did I hear it but I think everyone on the river heard it. The non-swearing translation of what he said was essentially, "Go to the side of the river immediately and get out of these big waves."

We couldn't keep going into the waves or we would fill the boat and sink, but now we had to take the waves on the beam to get out of there as quickly as possible. All I could think about was, just let me get to the side of the river. Kathy Kenley had, long ago when I was first learning to sea kayak, taught me the phrase "water goes up and down." Kim Greiner taught me to "lean forward and paddle low" when the waves get big in a canoe. And that's what I said to myself while paddling and bracing toward the shore, water goes up and down, lean forward and paddle low, water goes up and down, lean forward and paddle low.

We made it to the edge, Tony yelled, "Don't let it go back out there." I repeated, "Don't go back out there," but what I was thinking was, "Are you kidding me? There is no f'ing way in hell that I am going to go back out there." Approaching the checkpoint, with the water rolling a bit too much for my comfort even close to shore, Tony yelled, "It gets worse when we get around this corner, make sure the bailer is open." "Bailer open" is all I could manage to reply while in my mind I was having a panic attack at the thought of it being even worse.

Around the corner we went, into a sea of more whitecaps. Tony yelled, "Go straight over to that mountain, we can stay in the shelter of the mountain when we get there." "Straight to the mountain," I replied, while thinking, how the hell am I going to do that?

Quartering waves from the front kept my mind occupied for the next half mile of open water to the mountain. There was no way we could paddle with both of us on one side to keep us straight. The wind was too strong for my draw strokes to work. I couldn't call huts because I was sure we couldn't take the risk of changing sides in the open water in waves of this size. So I had to rudder occasionally to keep us on course. My shoulders started to burn, but I hoped we were headed toward some relief.

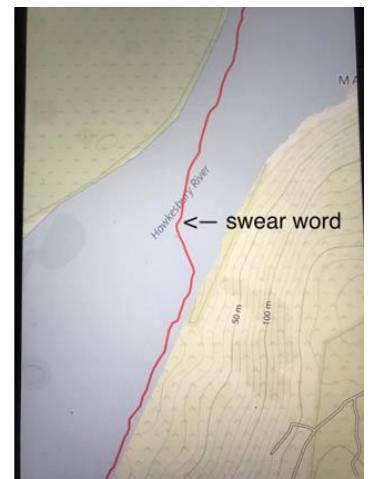
Once in the shelter of the mountain, Tony said, "We're going to cross back over up there and hug the left shore." "Cross over and stay left," I yelled all the while thinking how much more of this is there? Tony had said after the last checkpoint that there were 11 kilometers left, a little less than 7 miles. There were probably 4 or 5 more miles left as we began to cross the open water again. Just lean forward and paddle low, water goes up and down. I was fairly terrified to swim in the dark open water.

Once across, we hugged the shore, having to come out a bit now and again to go around big boat docks and big boats moored off the docks. There was now a group of about 6 boats together as we passed another checkpoint. The wind and waves were so loud that the volunteer on the boat couldn't hear me yelling our boat number. We had a little trouble at a few of the checkpoints with the volunteers understanding my American accent, and I think my accent combined with the howling wind meant that this volunteer just couldn't figure out what I was saying. Tony yelled the boat number too, and the man still couldn't get it. Finally another boat, one between us and the checkpoint powerboat, yelled our number for us. I don't know who they were but I was thankful they did it. I wasn't about to turn around in those conditions to try again.

"That was the easy part," Tony yelled, "It gets worse from here." I would have cried if I could have, but instead I just kept paddling, because there was zero other choice. And of course then the rains came.

I hit something squishy with my paddle. They told me if it squishes it's a jellyfish, if it's hard it's a shark. So far they were all squishy. A lot of squishes. And then there was the hard one. Sharks and jellyfish. Yep, there they were.

The final checkpoint was way out in open water, I was hitting jellyfish right and left and at least one shark with my paddle, it was raining, it was howling wind, it was cold, we had 4 kilometers to go, and the waves were bigger than any racing canoe should have ever been out on. I was scared, exhausted, thirsty, and we'd been out long enough that the tide was changing again and the sky was starting to get light. And worst of all, I was robbed of the beautiful phosphorescence I was promised once we got to the open water. Maybe it was there and I never



saw it, I wouldn't know, I was trying not to have a full out panic attack seeing the finish bridge in the far distance and knowing we had to cross the big white capped waves once again as one last final insult. Bam, my paddle hit something hard again.

I felt water on my ankles. I looked down and saw way too much water in the boat. There was nothing we could do. The bailer couldn't keep up with the waves pouring in. All it would take is one good slosh and we would be over. I thought, I am not swimming with the sharks. Lean forward and paddle low, water goes up and down. The bridge didn't seem to be getting any closer.

One of the best things about paddling with Tony is that he never changes pace. No matter what's happening, he is calm and steady. Wind, waves, jellyfish, sharks, spider bites, he never alters the stroke rate or the pace. Through it all, that never varying pace was thoroughly reassuring and it's what carried me along and kept me from screaming to quit. Coming across that last stretch of open water, it was particularly calming to watch my bowman never falter.

Nearly 13 hours after we started, we reached the finish line. My first, Tony's 27th. I was wobbly and light headed because we couldn't eat or drink for the last 11 kilometers, I stood in the parking lot and stripped buck naked and didn't care if anyone was looking, that's how bad I wanted dry and warm clothing, I had two big hot welts from whatever bit me on my leg, and it was hours before I stopped feeling like I was going up and down, but I did it, and I did it with a legend in the bow.

We learned a few minutes after we finished that, very shortly after we passed the last checkpoint before heading into the 11 kilometer open water section, that the race organizers shut down the race and stopped everyone behind us from continuing. Fully half the field was behind us and didn't get to finish the full distance due to the horrible conditions we faced. Half of me thought, those lucky dogs, the other half of me thought, thank God I finished so I never have to do this again.

Nodding off in the car, holding the Hawkesbury finisher medal that a nice volunteer lady handed me on the boat ramp, looking at my bowman nodding off next to me, I realized that finishing the Hawkesbury Classic really is no big deal. What it is, actually, is a very big deal.

Toughest race I've ever done.

And I can't wait until next year

