

Team ChicagoAdventureRacing takes on the Four Winds 2002

Through the courtesy of the Four Winds race organization and the Chicago Area Adventure Racing Association, I found myself with an entry to one of the USA's premier adventure races. All I needed was to find three other teammates, coordinate flights, transportation, gear shipment, hotel, find a crew, buy tons of new gear (that's the fun part), and prepare myself for the race. Although I had planned my team's participation in many races in the past four years, none would be close to this one.

The team was finalized only days before the race and included Tom Solie, Danny Bobrow, Colleen Kristofor, and myself. Tom was the first to respond in our search for teammates from the Chicago Area Adventure Racing Association. He was new to the sport, having done his first race in

June. Everyone told me to not try a race of this length with someone who has little race experience, but I had a good feeling that Tom would be a great teammate and I liked his enthusiasm for the sport. Danny was a veteran of mountaineering expeditions to some of the highest peaks in the world and an Ironman triathlon finisher, but he also brought limited adventure racing experience. Colleen was a true newcomer to



John & Tom at Registration



the sport with no race experience, purchasing her gear just days before the race, and having no opportunity to train with it. She would even be renting a bicycle in Salt Lake City. I brought the most race experience, with over 15 races over the past four years, but still no experience in a race longer than two days. In my four years of adventure racing I've been preparing myself for an expedition-style race. I just hadn't expected it to come together like this. We were heading to Salt Lake City for an eight-day race. We wouldn't even meet Colleen until we got to the airport. Friends and family are questioning my sanity, but my

past experience has taught me that personal goals and compatibility were significantly more important than time on the course and I had good feelings that we had put together a solid group.

We arrive at the mandatory gear check area and are instantly told by “Gear Master Jerry” that we have too much stuff. We’re all too aware of that fact, but it’s all on the required gear list. Three grueling hours later we’re through the equipment and skills check. Now, how are we going to haul all of this stuff?

Day 1 - We make it to the starting line with backpacks bursting at the seams with gear and feeling like



we’ve just shown up for the Tour de France on a Schwinn Stingray with a banana seat. How come we seem to have so much stuff and others have so little? All we have is the mandatory stuff...it’s too late to worry now. The countdown begins and the teams are off!

The race starts with a strenuous climb of the Peruvian Gulch trail, an incline that gains 3500 feet in a mile and a quarter reaching 11,000 feet. We choose a strategy of conserving energy on this tough opening section of the course and to let the

others burn up as we pass the remains along the way. Huffing and puffing our way to the top near the back of the pack we are rewarded with incredible alpine views that others are likely going too fast to enjoy.

Topping out on Hidden Peak, we traverse a knife-edge ridge, a jumbled mass of sharp broken rocks with over 500 feet of exposure on either side. Picking our way through the ridge and gazing at the surrounding terrain is why we’ve come here. This makes it worth the stress of preparation. On top of the second summit of the day at 11,700 feet, we’ve reached CP 1. At CP 2, we are presented with our first route finding challenge. We can follow a two-track road down to the bikes. It’s simple, but indirect due to many switchbacks on the mountain. Choice B involves reversing our course about ¼ mile and running 3000’ down a scree field and following a river to the bikes. It looks good on the map, but we could encounter terrain too steep to handle and may run into some tough bushwhacking. We could also be rewarded with a quick trip to the bikes, but we decide that we’re not ready to take chances as a new team and that we will play it safe with option A.

The alpine section is followed by a long bike ride through the mountains. We’re excited about the opportunity to get off our feet and make some progress on the bikes. That is, until we see the trail. It’s an uphill single-track trail that only a horse could love. The next 9 hours will have us pushing our bikes through the mountains instead of riding them. We arrive at the Timpanoossee Campground checkpoint at midnight and as we rest for a few minutes, we listen to the sounds of a bear growling nearby.

After a long day and night, we finally arrive at Transition Area 1, Utah Lake Campground, at 4:50 AM to find our crew, Jerry and Randy Bauer, ready for us. We decide to catch a couple of hours sleep and hit the water at daybreak.

Day 2 - Once on the water, we quickly move through checkpoints 10 and 11 at the south end of Utah Lake and we’re working our way toward checkpoint 12 on the west side of the lake. As in the first day, our navigation between points has been going well and was not a concern.



On the way to CP 12, the race director approaches us in a boat to tell us that the waves on the lake are getting too rough and that they want to route us away from CP 12 and back to CP 10 to avoid crossing the center of the lake where the waves are at their peak.

What had been a smooth afternoon paddle, allowing us to make up time, has suddenly turned into an exhausting effort battling wind and waves. Tom and I try to paddle toward shore in hopes that the waves are smaller near the shore. Making progress in any direction other than backward seems almost impossible as we watch the shore to the east appear to never

change. As we cross the waves sideways, water pours in filling the boat like a bathtub. Sandwiches, assorted gear and our water bladder hoses float in the filth in the bottom of our boat. Suddenly I've lost my appetite to eat or drink.

As we finally approach shore about 2 miles from the harbor, we realize that the water at this point is only knee deep and decide that it would be easier to get out and tow the boats. We drag the gear-laden crafts along the shore to the mouth of the Provo River. After picking our way through discarded pots, appliances, and other assorted household products exposed by low water levels, we reach a portage and haul our boats ashore, 10 ½ hours after we began the trip.

We get back to camp and quickly organize our gear for the next bike leg. The last item to complete before leaving was to decide our route and find checkpoints. Plotting the 8 points that we would encounter during this segment of the course is an arduous task, using more maps than there are points. The distance between some points is often 2 and 3 full map sections apart. I complete the maps at about 10:45 PM with Randy's help while the rest of the team gets some sleep.

I ask Randy to give me about 15 minutes to rest. While I lay in the tent, my mind races with things that need to be done... I want a few sandwiches for the bike leg. I need to have my light strapped to my helmet. Things keep coming to me but I don't want to get up and do any of it. Fifteen minutes comes way too quickly so I tell Randy that I have a better idea. "Can you do a few things for me and then give me until 2 AM? That way I can get some sleep too, we will spend less time trying to find our way in the dark and have less chance for navigational error." Randy's response..."How about 3 AM?" Ok. And I was asleep.





Day 3 - Sleeping until 3:00 AM was just what I needed as I feel refreshed and ready to go. I'd gotten some warm soup and a good sandwich a few hours before and I am feeling fueled up and ready to ride. The team is a little groggy but in good spirits as we pack up and head to the checkout.

Ten miles of easy pedaling through the City of Provo brings us to the trailhead at Rock Canyon. As we head into the canyon, Colleen struggles with the heavy rental bike and the weight of her

pack as gravity tries to pull the weight back down the hill. We're on foot again and I realize that I've made a big mistake. I anticipated a bike ride. We're in for another hike-a-bike, and all I've brought are bike shoes. That decision's going to bite me back hard!

After a few miles, our trail becomes a two-track road and continues to climb. We started at 4800' at Utah Lake, reached about 5800' at the Rock Canyon trailhead, and will top out on this trail at about 9000'. Although the road quality is good and rideable, we choose to walk which allows us to stay together as a team. Passing the time on the trail, Danny keeps us laughing with jokes and perfect reenactments of Monty Python skits.

At the bottom of a downhill, we run into, almost literally, the next obstacle on the course and one that will become a common sight through the rest of the trip...cows. These are not the docile cows that you see dotting midwestern fields, but enormous black and brown animals that stand in the middle of the trail without a care in the world, and definitely not intending to move for our sake. Tom has been out of water since we stopped two hours ago and the rest of us are either empty or getting low. I spot a spring on the map...we're saved! "Here it is, Tom." I announce. We're staring at a small pond with a cow standing in the middle, flies buzzing around, no apparent source of drainage, and mud-brown water. He scoops up a bladder full of cow sewage and pleads to me to find another source. We may be in luck as the map shows what may be houses a couple of miles down the road.

We finally pass a house and the owner lets us use the hose as we happily fill up. Tom flushes the funk from his water bladder as we all gorge ourselves on fresh, cold water. While we're eating and drinking, I am asked for what seems to be the hundredth time how much farther we have to go. How far have we gone? How many more climbs and descents and how big are they? How long will it take us? It becomes the "are we there yet" joke, but it's wearing really thin on everyone, as is this entire leg of the race. We've gone about 35 miles so far and by the race organizers estimate we have about 35 miles to go. It sure seems like there's more than 35 miles of map left though.

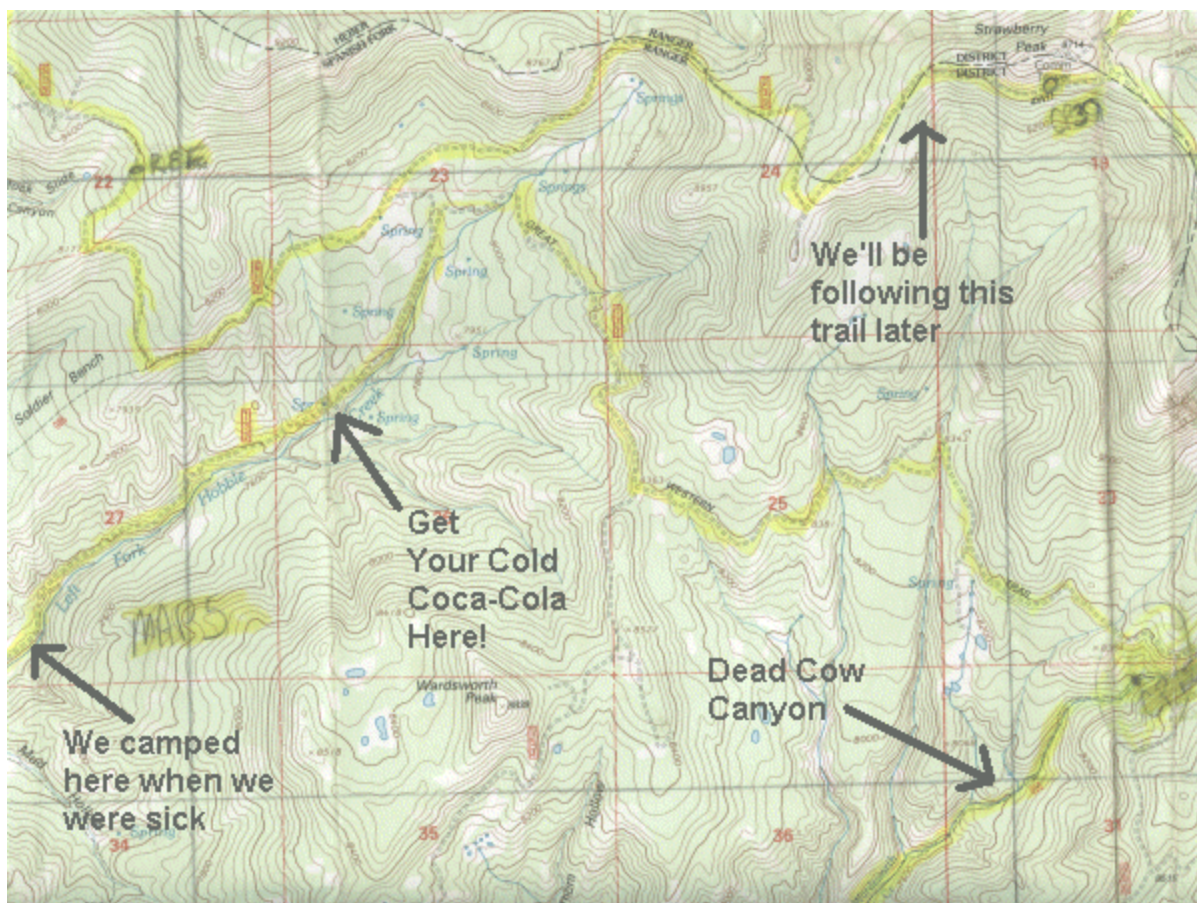
We've got a brief reprieve from jarring trails and we'll be on roads for the next 6-8 miles. As we leave, the first storm clouds in months in Utah begin to roll in. Just what we need! A long day of towing on foot and by bike has really taken a toll on me and I'm beat. I pull off to the side of the road with Danny and Tom and announce that I can't tow anymore. "Not a problem" they both say, "Let's get out of this rain" as they point to an old horse trailer in the front of a nearby building. We decide that it's got to be better than a cold, driving rain and we duck inside. The rain is just going to keep coming so we pull our stove and Danny brews up a tasty meal of cup-o-soup and hot chocolate. My stomach is growing queasy as we're sitting in the trailer and I'm progressively feeling worse. I finally stumble outside thinking I just need some

fresh air and suddenly I'm in the middle of a new experience for me in an Adventure Race...throwing up. This is not good for our time! This will definitely put us behind! I can't believe I'm getting sick. This sucks.

I'm lying on my back in a rock pile and it's strangely comfortable. I have to get up though because we've got a race to finish. I grab my bike and begin pedaling along with the rest of the team. I'm dragging behind and not happy about it. Colleen has also fallen sick by now and we decide to set up camp before we get worse. Throughout the night, she'll get worse, Danny will catch it too, and I'll start feeling better. The three sickies squeeze into Danny's two-person tent while Tom decides to stay away from us and builds a quick shelter using a space blanket. Once inside, there's no room to move but I don't care. I've got a very large rock jabbing me in the back, but it doesn't matter either. I just need to sleep, and I do. The tent is furiously unzipped and zipped throughout the night as sick people come and go. I wake slightly to hear the commotion but quickly drift back to sleep. I've had the least amount of sleep of the team at approximately 8 hours in the last 96 and the rest is badly needed.

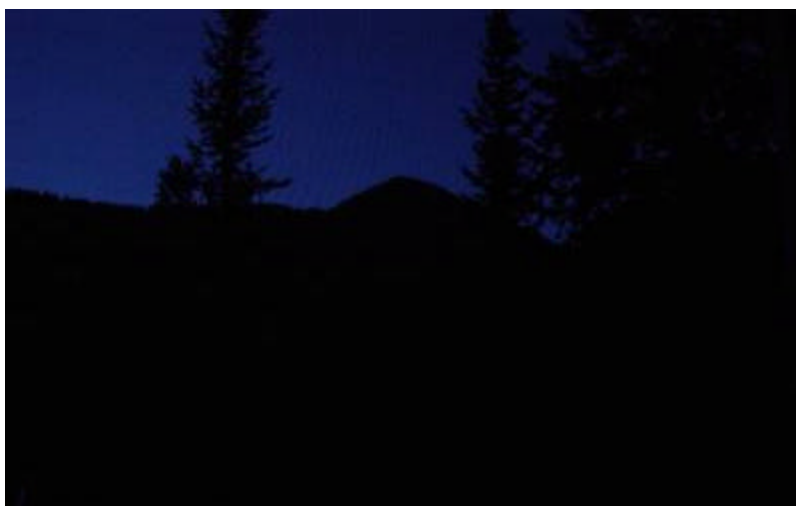
Day 4 - Danny gets up first and sets to taking care of the sick teammates. He breaks out the stove and cooks up freeze-dried eggs. It's amazing how good food in a bag can taste! It's moments like this that make me realize that we really are a team and we're all working to get the entire group through the race together.

We get back on the trail at 9:30, 12 hours after we stopped. Colleen is still feeling pretty rough, but she finds the strength to keep moving. We've been on this bike leg for 29 ½ hours and my odometer reads 40 miles. We're facing a 2000' plus climb, followed by a brief downhill and a drop down a canyon on a single-track trail. The blazing sun is baking us. We're hiking along talking about what we would want when we get back to camp. Both Colleen and I are dreaming of an ice-cold soda.



A few minutes later, two hunters pass and I spot a cooler in the back of the truck. “Got any sodas in there?” Three cold Cokes later and the day has suddenly turned around.

We top out on this trail and we’re excited about the possibility of a good, fast downhill section through Wardsworth Canyon, until we actually get there. The trail turns out to be an insane jumble of rocks, roots, downed trees, overgrown trail, stream crossings, and the occasional precarious cliff face. While a considerable portion of the trail is certainly rideable, we frustratingly walk to keep the group together. What we had originally expected to last 45 minutes, and in reality should take about 2 hours, ends up taking over 9.



Like other areas of trail we had been through so far, we hear and see cows here too. But this canyon holds a special memory, and will forever be known as Dead Cow Canyon. We arrive at a river crossing about 3 miles into the canyon. I’m leading as we come through the bushes and I’m staring eyes to udder with a cow, freshly fallen, rigor mortis set in and laying on its’ side in the river. Eyes open, legs

stick straight, and a really funny sight, in a morbid sort of way. Colleen is right behind me as I reach the river and she asks, "What is that", just to be sure she's not hallucinating. "A cow", I tell her, and we continue on without a word.

The arduous canyon trek ends at midnight at CP 15A where we find a bottle of fresh water and a note from the CP staff left 12 hours earlier, wishing us luck. We're now 44 hours into the bike leg. At one point in the canyon, Danny and I pulled out the maps to check the mileage remaining. Forty-one? This can't be right. We can't bear to tell the others. Tom takes a look at the maps at this point so he too can get an idea of the upcoming terrain and distance. We've gone about 4 miles since Danny and I counted and Tom comes up with 37 miles. My fear has been confirmed...we were right. We thought we were almost done and now we have an extra 20 miles to deal with. We feel like we'll never make it.

Another uphill grind. It's late and everyone is getting sleepy and not doing a very solid job of fighting off the sleep monster. Less than an hour into the hike after emerging from the canyon, Danny announces that he would like to take a nap. We stop by the side of the road for a much needed stop. I continue to insist that we need to be careful of our stops. Nobody wants to hear me talk about this anymore, but I'm truly concerned about the possibility of being removed from the course due to time cutoffs. Less than an hour later the sleep monster visits again and everyone begs for sleep. I agree that sleep is necessary through the race and that pushing too far without sleep is unwise, but we've had 12 hours in the last 24 and I try to reinforce the fact that I've been trying to make all along. You don't need as much sleep as you think, and averaging 2-3 hours per night means that you might not sleep some nights if you need to push through. You'll make up the sleep time later. Right now, we're in danger and we need to push through but reasoning is lost on sleepy brains. "Half an hour," I ask. There's no answer as the team dig out sleeping bags and settles into the side of the hill for what looks like a long nap. Sleeping bags are a sure sign of trouble because you get too cozy and never want to come out. My frustration at our too frequent rest stops shows as I tell them about the danger we face. "You're amazing, that you can keep going without sleep, I just don't get it," Danny says to me. I'm flattered, but also disappointed that they too don't see that it's possible. I refuse to get too comfortable, instead sitting on the hill behind them sulking in my frustration, waiting to begin moving again.



It's cold outside, probably in the 40's, and the body's natural alarm clock, the shivers, wakes me up after 30-45 minutes of rest. I'm up and ready to go. After 10-15 minutes of coaxing, we're all on our way.

Somewhere in the night around this time we break out the mandatory radio and try to let race management know we're alive since we've been out here much longer than we expected. But I might as well

be carrying a brick as we can't reach anyone. I'm thinking about how Randy and Jerry must be concerned about where we are, do we have enough food and water, is anyone hurt? If only they knew that we were OK, they could relax and get some rest. I imagine that crewing is almost as tough as the race itself. I hope Kellie is OK. What can Randy tell her? This has got to be driving her crazy!

Day 5 - We reach the next downhill section at about 3:30 AM. I'm feeling great and have been ever since coming out of Wardsworth Canyon. My feet are killing me because I've been wearing bike shoes on a 40+ hour hike. I've paid some attention to them, but not nearly enough. This last few miles of the bike leg has

been on smoothly-graded gravel roads. I've learned over the past few miles that it's much easier for me to stay on the bike and pedal, however slow it may be. It's easier on the feet and it feels more like progress.

We are near CP 16 but the checkpoint marker is not where it is supposed to be. I decide quickly that we are definitely in the right spot, and the CP is not. The Four Winds team has not historically hid checkpoints, so we continue on with the belief that the CP is missing. We'll make a note and let them know at Strawberry Reservoir. We struggle through the last couple of hours of darkness through rolling ups and downs on our way to CP 17. I'm feeling confident of our position on the map and think I'm getting pretty good at reading and identifying the mountainous terrain. I also decide that my Suunto Vector altimeter watch is the single best investment I have ever made in race equipment. What an awesome navigational aid!



On the way to CP 17, we find an incredible surprise. At the top of a hill we come across a tent with race officials. It turns out that they're the CP for the hiking section that passes next to the bike leg. We also get our first glimpse of Strawberry Reservoir. It's exciting to finally see our destination and our spirits pick up. The real bonus though is military rations! A banquet of MRE's (Meals Ready to Eat) is spread out before us and you would never believe how good cold ravioli could taste. Snack pudding and fresh cold water round out the meal as we stuff ourselves, sitting at 8400' watching over the valley below.

The checkpoint volunteer, "Ski Patrol Mike", watches Danny walk away from the rest of the group and says "watch him, he's definitely a city guy, he's peeing into the wind." It seems like a good metaphor for this bike ride.

CP 17 is another 1/2 mile away. The ride from 17 to the road is a fast single track downhill. This time it's a nice hard packed trail dropping about 1000' over 3 miles. This trail brings more animals, but of a different variety. Thousands of sheep line the trail and clog the way. We race down the trail baaing at them and laughing as they scatter. Just another in a long line of weird experiences.



As we get within a few miles of Strawberry Reservoir, Colleen finds a burst of energy. She's cranking up the hills! These last few miles go quickly as we ride like horses racing back to the stable. Of course, we have more bike problems but we refuse to let them slow us down. Tom's derailleur snaps off his bike, so we convert his bike to a single gear by breaking the chain and removing the derailleur. Tom gets another flat tire. Tom's rear disk brake explodes in a shower of springs and screws. No big deal, just pack up the shrapnel and continue on.

Sixty-four hours after we started, we reach the park road and the marina is in sight. Everyone's excited to see us after our epic as Will from Team Aardvark hugs me and says, "Man, we didn't know where you were and Randy was going nuts, it's good to have you back." We walk up to the CP and proudly announce, "we didn't get eaten by bears, we did not have to cut into one of those cows for food, and absolutely, positively, at no time were we ever lost!" The bike ride is finally over!

McDonalds burgers, fries, and shakes are waiting for us. I wolf down a Double Quarter Pounder and a Double Cheeseburger, washed down with two tall lemonades and a strawberry shake...kind of appropriate since we're at Strawberry Reservoir!

With gear prepared and stomach full, I head off with Randy for some map study time before hitting the boats. I work for about an hour and fall asleep reading the maps. Randy graciously offers to work on the route while he loads me into a nearby bed. What a great friend! How many people would give up vacation and family time to work as hard as he and Jerry have this week. Their support is appreciated.

Day 6 - I wake up a couple of hours later to learn that they've called a doctor to come check out Colleen and Danny. Stomach troubles have really taken their toll on Colleen. The EMT says that neither of them is severely dehydrated, but they aren't actually in good shape either. He fills them up with Immodium and says he wants them to rest until 12 noon. What?!? No way! We all protest the decision, despite the opportunity to rest. That's way too long! "OK, I'll be back between 7:30 and 8:00 to check her out and we'll talk about it then", he says. At 8:30 he still hasn't come back. "Randy, go get them because I'm not waiting any more...we're leaving". Team ChicagoAdventureracing.org is back in the race!

The paddle begins in calm water and will hopefully remain much calmer than Utah Lake. We're expecting about 30 miles versus our previous paddling session of 24. Strawberry Reservoir is notorious for afternoon winds and the reservoir has several channels between islands that we'll be passing through, which could either deaden or increase wind speed. Navigation is interesting too as the terrain is comprised mostly of barren desert-like landscape, making what should be prominent points of land appear to blend together.

We're continuing to experiment with different team configurations in the boats. This time, Colleen and I are together with Colleen paddling in front. We're really working well together and I think we've found a winning combination. I find this to be one of my favorite parts of the race so far as Colleen and I talk for hours about the past couple of days, family, and why we race. I begin to think about how the team started, the nervousness I felt at going into a race with unknown teammates, and how impressed I am that we've

come together well and worked together as a team. We're doing a great job of overcoming weaknesses with each other's strengths. I've felt the pressure throughout the race as the team's navigator and they've really helped by encouraging me and letting me know they appreciate the work I'm doing in moving the team through the course.

We finish the paddle, still in the light of day near 7 PM. We made great time and once again, navigation was flawless. We quickly swap paddling gear for bikes, grab some food, and we're off again, this time on the next to last bike leg of the race. We climb from about 7600' to reach the 9600' mark after midnight, after a couple of tricky navigational options.

Day 7 - The midnight downhill to Currant Reservoir proves to be a test of the entire team's abilities. Rocks best described as "baby heads" litter the trail. There is no escape for the next five miles. The trail is quite steep. It's very dark. Although it sounds like a disaster waiting to happen, we work extremely well taking the trail in steps and leading each other through what we believe is the best path. We maintain good speed without any major falls. I'm quite impressed with our run as a team.

We reach Currant Reservoir at about 3 am. Our spirits are high as we come across one other team, New York Adventure Racing, sleeping in the parking lot. We wake Randy, Jerry and "Checkpoint Charlie", and learn our challenge. One teammate has to put on a wetsuit while all four circle the lake to the CP on the other side. Once on the other side, the wet suited teammate goes in the water about 10 yards to the checkpoint and we're done. Sounds easy and a possible opportunity to make up time. Danny agrees to suit up and go into the reservoir.

At this point, we learn some news from the crew. On the way to Currant Reservoir, they lost two bags off the back of the truck. (We've nicknamed the support crew vehicle the "Sanford and Son Mobile", after it's teetering mass of equipment, both inside and outside the truck. It was only a matter of time before things started flying off). The good news, both bags were recovered. The bad news, the bag containing all our paddling gear, including wetsuits, PFD's, bilge pumps, etc, was involved in a head-on collision with a semi. Plastic items like bilge pumps and stove lights were obliterated. Most wetsuits and PFD's seem to have survived, but my wetsuit now has a large tire print running up the center.



Danny suits up and we begin the dark trek along the lakeshore. Halfway to the CP, we lose the trail, and in our tired and agreeable state, we all decide to get a couple hours sleep, hit the CP at sunrise in 2 hours, and take off. Through the evening, we've said that our goal was to get to the horses before sleeping and we hope that this stop doesn't hurt us too much. It's getting late in the race, now on day 7. We're starting to see the end and hopefully not getting too confident yet.

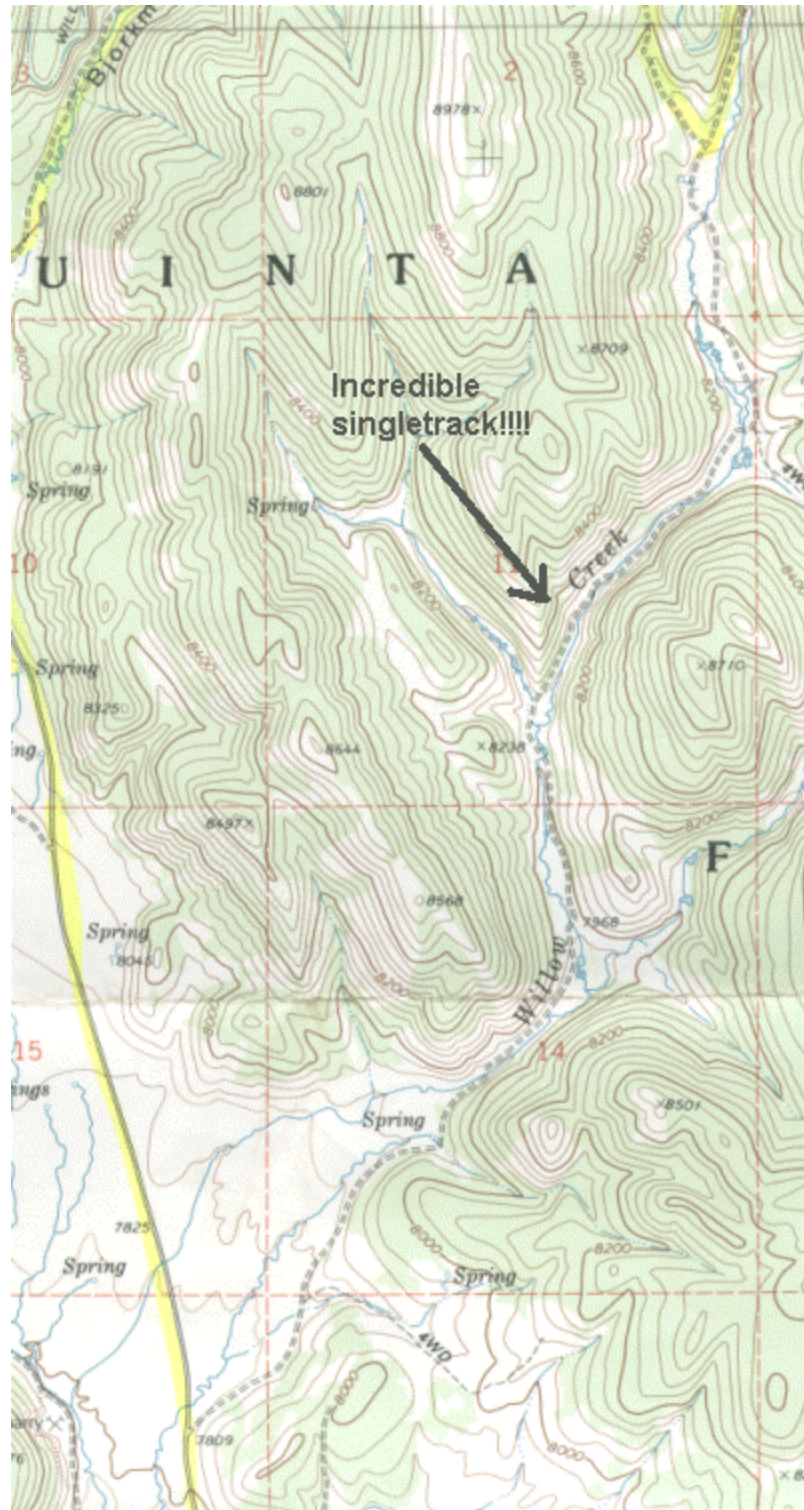
After a couple hours rest, we wake and get ready for the swim. As has been a common problem for our group throughout the race, it takes us well over an hour to get ready to go to the CP and another hour after that to get on the bikes. This will hurt us!

The final bike leg before the horses follows the same theme of long, gradual thigh-burning climbs. The roads are better than most sections have been and we've got an opportunity to pedal during the daylight. Tom is strong as an ox and is powering up all the hills. Danny's feeling really strong today too and offers to take on the day's towing responsibilities. Together, he and Colleen crank hard up the first 5-6 miles of hills, putting a significant dent in the days ride.

After topping out on this road near 8400', we are treated to a long fast downhill run, it seems to be the first truly enjoyable downhill run in many days on the bikes. Cows again figure into the action, this time numbering over 100 and they're all standing in the road, of course. We race through the herd yelling at the cows to move as they begin a stampede in front of us. We're riding pretty close to them as they reach the hoof grates in the road, realize they cannot continue, and begin darting left and right, knocking each other over like bowling pins in the process.

I chase Colleen down as she's leading the group down the hill. We reach another fork in the road and another decision point; either option will take us to our destination. Both appear on the map as two- tracks, but one, the more direct route is actually a downhill single track trail. The single track has the potential to cut 2-3 miles from our trip, but Utah single track has been deceiving so far. The last time we got excited about downhill we ended up in the infamous Dead Cow Canyon for the better part of a day. We discuss the options for a minute and the team unanimously decides to go for the single track.

This story, unlike so many others, has a happy ending as we are rewarded with the single most spectacular 3 miles of trail any member of the team has ever touched with knobby



tires. It's an absolutely amazing hard pack trail with a gentle downhill grade, meandering through a wildflower and eucalyptus filled canyon. Numerous stream crossings at high speed cool us down from the mid-day sun and add even more excitement. We can't believe both the beauty of the canyon and the good fortune that led us to this decision to be on this trail.

One of our quickest transitions of the race, about 30 minutes, takes us to the horses. The horseback section turns out to be an uneventful slog, except that now we've added two beasts that we have to baby-sit for the trip. Seven miles uphill and another seven back down will bring us back to the final supported TA of the race.

On the way back to the transition area, Danny and I discuss strategy for the rest of the race and the need for discipline in the final day and a half ahead of us. As the team organizes gear and eats the Domino's pizza that Randy and Jerry picked up (a taste of civilization!), we talk about what it will take to finish and gain the commitment of the entire team. Our plan starts with a complete rebuilding of our packs, eliminating any unnecessary items.



Discipline around the number of length of rest breaks is important. No more than 15 minutes sleep at a time. Five-minute breaks about once every 2 hours, and we agree to not remove the packs during the rest breaks. Constant movement, regular eating, and hydration are key elements to success. All agreed, we rebuild the packs, grab an hour of sleep and head out at 12:30 am. We don't expect to see the crew until the finish line.

Our goal: 24 hours to the finish.

Day 8 - Zombie-like, we hike up the trail to 9700' Strawberry Peak. We pass Team Pine Nuts, huddled in the trees out of the wind. We're struggling in the early morning hours between 2 and 5 AM. The sleep monster is on our shoulder and we're nearly falling over in our tracks. All we need to do is keep hanging in until the sun rises and everything will feel different. Near 6 AM, we can see the trail and we also begin to brighten up. The higher the sun, the higher our energy. But, on one hour of sleep in the past 35, there is a limit to our enthusiasm.

With a close eye on the map, we follow a road west out of the valley, continuing on the Great Western Trail. We're moving into another canyon getting ready to climb the trail, when the trail forks. According to the map, the trail heads straight down the middle of the canyon and climbs the right side of the end of the canyon to meet our trail. Although the Great Western Trail splits to the right, I choose straight and the team follows. Reading our position on the map I'm seeing everything as expected. I've also got this eerie déjà vu feeling that I've been in this exact canyon before and have chosen this route before. It seems so real and I only wish I knew how the trail turned out.

The dream version likely turns out better because this one isn't what we hoped for. Our trail has disappeared after 300' of bushwhacking up the back of the canyon. I admit defeat and apologize for the mistake, and for ultimately wasting an hour of precious time. Going into this canyon, our navigation had been flawless and I'm particularly upset at this breakdown in discipline. We had watched Team Pine Nuts

follow the Great Western Trail to the right and in a moment of pride and overconfidence, I thought we could use the map to outsmart them. I was wrong and we all had to pay the price. We make our way back to the correct trail and begin the 10-mile trek to our next and what is expected to be the final obstacle, Shingle Mill Canyon.

My hallucinations begin along the Great Western Trail. We come around a corner and I see a man sitting under a shade tree wearing a sombrero. He is in the shadows, so I can't make out any features, but I notice that he has a young boy with him.

We reach Windy Pass, a saddle between two mountains and the point at which we will begin our descent to Shingle Mill Canyon and our final climb of the race. Here at 9000' I find a sign pointing to water. This time I'm not seeing things. I hike 100 yards down the mountain to find a horse corral. Dreaming of a sparkling clear stream, I instead find a fly-infested horse trough with 3 inches of water covering a layer of mud. There's a black pipe slowly dripping water into the trough from a mysterious underground source. I hold my bladder under the dripping pipe and patiently wait. After about 5 minutes, I've got a liter and decide that will do. I get back to the top and Danny asks about the water. "It's great...if you're a horse", I reply, as I repack my backpack.



The sun is fading quickly and I'm anxious to get to the bottom of the canyon and find our trailhead before dark. While the rest of the team finishes their food, I head out and run down the trail, losing 1400' of elevation over the two-mile rock-strewn trail. I reach the bottom and find the trailhead just as the last rays of sunshine are left. I wait for the team, believing that they are close behind. Fifteen minutes pass and I grow concerned. It's dark now and I don't see headlamps or hear voices. Where can they be? I eat while watching the field

mice chase scraps of food. The hallucinations begin again and I imagine a family of mice, huddled together with their little arms wrapped around each other in a hug, shivering in the cold. I stare as they stare back. I finally decide that they are just leaves.

Forty minutes have passed and I am shaken by the sound of a whistle. Is someone hurt? I get up and quickly start to climb the trail yelling my teammates names. I see headlamps and hear their voices. They're coming and everyone's OK, just moving slowly.

From the bottom of Shingle Mill Canyon, we need to climb to 10,000', a 2400' rise. There's a reference point on the right side of the canyon that we need to work toward as the trail wanders around the field, randomly appearing and disappearing. It's getting steeper and it's so dark that we can't tell if we're on the right or left side of the canyon. A couple hundred feet up the trail takes a turn to the right, but the canyon walls still suggest we're on the left side. We reach the riverbed, but it's on our right side, as we're drifting left. We're all twisted around and I've got that strange déjà vu feeling again. I know that I've been in this canyon at night before. I remember everything. The way the trail moves, the dry riverbed splitting into a Y, the steepness of the terrain, the rousting of sleeping wildlife, and the feeling that this is not going our way.

We keep climbing, leading left. At 8400' the trail ends. We need to be on the right. I believe that we're on the left. Tom thinks we're on the right.

Tom and I decide to climb up further to better assess the terrain and determine our position. It's so dark that our headlamps and flashlights are not able to help us. Breaking out the handheld flashlight means I have now used every piece of equipment I have been hauling, with exception of

climbing gear. Search for a trail, we try to bushwhack through the landmass to our right thinking we can work our way over to the reference point. We're exhausted. I'm stumbling dangerously along the steep trail, barely staying awake. The hallucinations continue as the wildflowers look like little people with outstretched arms and legs rocking towards and away from me. It was if they were teasing me, laughing at me. Stumps looked like people sitting on chairs. One flower appeared in the shape of a skull. Everything had eyes.

Bushwhacking is useless as the brush is just too dense. It's past midnight and we've been trying to work our way out of the canyon since 9 PM or earlier, with no progress. We're extremely tired and almost out of water. We're quickly coming to grips with the reality of the situation. We're stuck in this canyon. It's impassable at night, especially in our condition. We desperately descend to the starting point at the bottom of the canyon, hoping to find another way out.

Tom and I are not ready to accept defeat and we continue to search for a trail at the bottom of the canyon. Danny and Colleen shut down, too exhausted to continue. Tom reluctantly follows, frustrated at the knowledge that our race is over. The race cutoff time is at 8 AM and we won't finish. I hike down the trail trying to find a trail that is clearly marked on the map. It's not here. I come back to the trailhead and sit on my sleeping bag and stare at the maps hoping to find another way. After 185 hours on the trail, our dream of finishing this expedition race is over a mere 4 or 5 hours from the finish line. After all the difficulty this team has faced and after how well we've come together as a group, we will not finish the Four Winds Supreme this year.

I turn out my light.



Although we didn't finish the race, we accomplished our other goals. We're better friends than when we started, all gaining respect for each other's abilities. We've learned a lot about expedition racing. We represented the Chicago Area Adventure Racing Association proudly, both as strong competitors and as ambassadors of the sport. For a new team that has never raced together and with no team member having experience in races longer than 2 days, we've got a lot to be proud of!

My personal challenge for this race was to find out if I have what it takes to compete in an expedition race. Do I have the skills, the navigational ability, the strength, stamina, and the smarts? Can I manage sleeplessness over a long race? Can I lead a team through a major race? I believe that I have proven that I can. My perspective on racing has changed forever.

Among other things, this race has really reinforced that it takes a team, rather than four individuals working alone, to make it as far as we have. I'm proud of this team and myself. It has been a successful race!



Thanks to Four Winds Adventures for letting us experience this event and thanks to the Chicago Area Adventure Racing Association for your support! Jerry and Randy, we owe you a lot!

Four Winds, be ready for us in '03...we'll see you at the finish line!

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