



APPALACHIAN EXTREME RACE REPORT Bethel, ME

By Scott Cole
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(Scott Cole and Grant Sisler, along with teammate Cassie Gran, raced under the name "Team TDS Telecom", thanks to generous sponsorship support from Michael Ogden, Public Relations Administrator, TDS Telecom)

Well, since a number of you have expressed interest in my take on the race (and cause I'm sitting here w/o any work to do-- opps, don't tell the boss) I figured I'd concoct a story, er.... i mean, explain what happened this w/e.

First the basics: Our team of three (Cassie, Grant, and I) started at 8 am Saturday with 24 other teams. The race involved about 260 miles of nonstop travel in the following order (well, throw in a few wrong turns and the actual mileage may be a bit higher) :

- Trek (14 miles)
- Paddle (19 miles)
- bike (34 miles)
- Trek (40 miles)
- Paddle (30 miles)
- Bike (106 miles)
- Trek (14 miles)

So ... to keep this story interesting, I'll skip pass those long boring parts of the race where nothing actually happened (although there wasn't much of that !). We started off slow, 21st out of 24 teams after the first trek section, but caught 5 teams on the paddle and a few on the bike. We finished the first three sections b/f dark fell Saturday night and after a big fuel-up and change of clothes, we headed off into the fading twilight for our 40 mile trek. So far, no major wrong turns, perfect weather, and healthy feet...

This next section was the crux of the race, this is where teams bailed out, got lost, called for rescues, cursed the race director and kept their feet consistently wet. It took us over 20 hours to complete this, arriving for the next paddle section just as the sun went down on Sunday night, our feet on fire from rotting trenchfoot, blisters, and empty stomachs that couldn't stand the thought of squeezing another Power Gel into our sugary mouths.... Anyway, here's what happened: the trek essentially started with about 15 miles of dirt roads and 4WD tracks that petered out into a muddy streambeds. We safely negotiated most of this b/f the sun came up Monday morning. But that was when the fun started. The real buzz-kill on this course was a bushwhack section up and over a 3,000 foot notch complete with 3 food snow drafts (yeah, the nice soft snow that allows you the pleasure of sinking into 3-foot holes every 10 seconds or so) and thick, gnarled Maine Woods. We essentially took a bearing and headed straight up and over this notch (and literally THROUGH the trees) and down through the drainage on the



back side in about 5 hours (it probably totaled no more than 2 miles) and finally found the checkpoint on the other end. As if the snow wasn't enough to make you give in, quit, and forget about all you did to get to that point, the constant 45 degree temps and driving rain almost put you over the top. But there's something unique about watching other teams battle their way down through the same mess you find yourself in-- a bonding w/ total strangers that inevitably ends with you concluding: "Hey, if they can do it, so can I." So we did.

According to the map, the next segment of this 40 mile epic suggested another bushwhack and another 3,000 foot crossing (surely with more snow)-- but NO WAY. We walked our sorry asses all the way around the mountain and back up the other side. By now we were blessed with sunny skies and muggy temps and we got plenty warm. A few more wrong turns later and another 15 miles or so we found our support crew wondering what the hell happened. We just shoved hot Fajitas, PB&Js, tuna sandwiches, and bananas down our holes and went in for a 30 minute nap b/f the big paddle-portage fest ...

The paddle was awesome-- clearly the highlight! Clear night, mirror-like lake surface and bright FULL MOON, just an incredible evening, picture perfect and allowed for a much faster section than we anticipated. Grant and I took turns portaging the boat on our shoulders, while Cassie carried the paddles and other gear. While on the water, we cruised sliced our way through the 30 mile course and found all the hidden island Checkpoints w/o a problem (thanks to some accurate compass readings) and arrived 8 hours later at 6:30 in the morning ready to get on our bikes, except We had beat our support crew to the transition area !! we had told them to expect a 12 hour paddle, but w/ the perfect conditions, we arrived much faster. But no worries, they arrived 10 minutes later, got our bikes out and put together, we shoveled more food, got the maps together for the next section and off we went on the 106 mile pedal, complete with some of the nastiest navigational challenges I had ever seen.

Our first check point on the bike section involved a river crossing and "hike-a-bike" through an old trail that I had partially explored leading up to the race. Thanks to my home-field advantage, I was able to "Nav" the team into 6th place overall by 9 am Monday. From this point, were able to hang with a number of teams b/w 6th and 9th place. The bike involved a number of roads that didn't show up on the map, or roads that the maps told you were there, but in reality were NOT. We made a number of wrong turns, backtracks, and "think huddles" with other teams as we scratched our heads about where to go next. We finally made it through the toughest part of the nav and were told that we were only 5 hours behind the race leaders ! Yes, I know you're thinking 5 hours is a lot, but not in this race. We made our way out to the paved road where we faced a long paved road. We tried unsuccessfully to get 4 different teams of three together to create a pace-line, ideally to help pull one another along. But a huge variation in biking skills quickly caused our pace line to explode into a less efficient groups of individual teams. After a much anticipated country store stop for B & J's ice cream, yogurt and a coke, we kept hammering south toward the final transition to the last trek and the finish line.... But for our team, it wasn't meant to be. As night fell for the third time, both Grant and I couldn't resist the urge to close our eyes while biking. The



navigation was fairly easy, but staying upright on the bike was not. At one point I managed to come to a stop on the wrong side of the road, fall asleep, then woke up again and, figuring I was on the other side of the road, started to pedal in the wrong direction !

Luckily, I was alert enough to know that the river should be on my right, not my left, so I flagged down the next car and he hold me he saw a bunch of bikers back in the other direction-- holy shit, that would have been a time-consuming mistake !! Within a short time, Grant was coming back toward me asking what the hell had happened. "Oh nothing, just wanted to make sure we hadn't dropped anything back here"

The transition area to the final hike was also known as Checkpoint 29 and we needed to get there by 2 am. Well, a little after midnight we stumbled into Checkpoint 28, about 20 miles before CP 29. We were exhausted and knew that we could never make the 2 am cut-off. We held what I would loosely call a "discussion" about what to do next (this is where I try to keep my head up long enough to look at Grant as he describes our options, then i look down and try to catch a few ZZ's and hope Grant doesn't see that I'm ignoring him). Long story short, completely exhausted and shivering in our cold sweat, we decided to call off the race. The team we had been racing with, Team Nomad, was right with us at that point, but decided to push on to CP 29 regardless of the cut off. The result: the cut-off time got moved forward to 5 am (only ONE team had actually made that cut-off), giving an extra 3 hours and allowing Team Nomad to finish the whole course and finish in 4th place. We had to wait for our support crew to come pick us up. Game over. ~ 60 hours and 225 miles completed, but a DNF next to our name in the standings.

Hopefully a happier ending next time. B/f I go, I must acknowledge our awesome support crew! Tom and Cindy were incredible. They got compliments from all the other support crews and Grant and I were told more than once during the post-race banquet that we were lucky to have the best crew out there-- thanks guys and we'd be honored (and surprised) if you want to do it again next year ! !

Later,
Scott