

The BEAR (Beach Extreme Adventure Race) August 12, 2000

By: Renee Johnson

Our final race of 2000 was a real bear. Literally, I'm not kidding! It was called the Beach Extreme Adventure Race (BEAR) and it was held in Jacksonville, FL on Saturday, August 12. My teammates were Derek Kozlowski and Katie Malone (an SRC member), who you'll remember I raced with in GA in the June Hi-Tec race. The race involved about 6 miles of trail running, 12-15 miles of mountain biking on single-track trails, and about 1 1/2 miles kayaking - part of that in the ocean. Also, there was a short orienteering course too, and a bunch of "mystery events" along the way. We started with a short run on the beach, and we quickly hit the trails on foot. We made good time on this leg of the race - a steady pace, even if it's slow, is better than tearing through the woods at breakneck speed, then walking because you're tired. We encountered two mystery events while on the run - we had to name 4 oceans (we went with Atlantic, Pacific, Indian, and the North Sea), and we had to carry one team member back to the transition area (TA). At this second mystery event, the instruction sheet said that each team had to have a 2 x 4 board, but it didn't say that we had to have the team member on the board. Therefore, I jumped on Derek's back and Katie grabbed the board and off we went. We passed a number of teams on the boardwalk access to the beach, and we also passed one of the race directors as he observed from the boardwalk railing. I could tell by the look on his face that he was proud of us for reading the directions thoroughly, and paying attention to what they did and didn't say. We were the first team to use this carrying method, and after us, a whole bunch of other teams followed our lead. We transitioned to the kayak part of the race. We had done well on the run, and we were the 3rd team to put our kayaks in the ocean. However, this is where we encountered an insurmountable wall - of water, one after the other! The race had started about 30 minutes late, and this is where we paid for it because the tide was coming in strong. Katie was having trouble getting her 1-person kayak out past the waves, and Derek and I were having trouble with the 2-person boat. We had the wrong kind of boats - the kind that you sit in, not on top of. The sit-in boats were getting swamped with every wave! Finally, Derek helped Katie get out, and then he and I decided that I should swim out, and he'd bring the boat (I had been trying to paddle the boat through the waves, and kept getting dumped). I had prepared for swimming by taking lessons at the Spartanburg Athletic Club, but out there I couldn't make any progress doing the crawl or the breast stroke. I ended up flipping over on my back and doing a modified version of the back stroke. This was difficult because I was wearing my trail running shoes, but it was doable because I was wearing my lifejacket, which was mandatory for the kayak leg of the race, and I'm sure it saved my life more than once that day. Once out past the waves, Katie and Derek lined up the boats and anchored them together by each holding onto both paddles, and helped me into the 2-person boat. We only had to paddle about 400 meters before a race official on the shore signaled us to come in. On the way in to the shore, we were unable to catch a wave, so we got dumped and the kayak got swamped. We portaged in to a small lake and

paddled around the perimeter of it. Before exiting the lake, we had to beach the boats and climb up and over a 30-35 foot tall rope wall. We portaged back to the ocean, and used the method that finally worked for us the first time - I swam the back stroke and Katie and Derek brought the boats. Back at the TA, we ditched the boats (which by this time we hated) and left on our bikes. After a short ride on the beach, we had to go up to a parking lot and start on the bike course. We noticed that there was a nice, smooth boardwalk that went right to the parking lot, and we used it to pass a number of teams that were trudging and pushing their bikes through deep sand! Nothing in the instructions said to stay off the boardwalk! We started on the bike course too fast for me, and I was nervous and shaking - that's not good when you're holding onto a bike's handlebars! I had to insist that we slow down the pace so that I could calm down and hopefully not crash any more than I already had. We did get passed by a few teams because of this. Another mystery event - we came upon a dirty brown pond with a rope strung across it, tied to a tree on each side. We had to momentarily ditch the bikes and get in the pond, using a hand-over-hand technique on the rope to pull ourselves across the pond. I was very warm at this time, and the cool water was a refreshing break! Since we had to do the bike loop twice, we also had to cross the pond twice. Later, we were told that there were probably alligators in the pond. Back on the bikes. There were two plywood walls on the course - one near the entrance to the TA and one near the start of the bike course. Each time we encountered one of these walls, we had to go over it; even if we had our bikes with us. In fact, the bikes had to go over too. Derek would climb to the top and sit, and I would hand the bikes to him, one by one. Katie was on the other side taking the bikes and laying them down. After we got the bikes over, we had to go over. One at a time, Katie and I would get a running start, run up the ramp, and hang on to the top of the wall. Derek would push us up (via the butt) so that we could swing one leg over, and we'd take care of ourselves on the way down. This was the cause of a huge bruise and many scratches on the back of my right thigh, because it was always my right leg that went over the wall first. After biking, we transitioned to the orienteering course. On this leg of the race, we had to keep track of our pace count to measure how far we'd traveled, and stop at certain points to take compass readings. We did some bushwhacking and crossed a semi-dried up creek (it was still kind of wet and had enough sucking capability to almost take off Katie's shoe), saw some huge spiders in the woods, and Derek ran into a web that actually pushed him backwards, it was so strong! A couple of mystery events we encountered on the orienteering course: we had to negotiate a children's jungle gym without touching the ground (a board-and-chain bridge, monkey bars, a handle that slid from one platform to another), we had to name all of the states that border the Atlantic Ocean, from south to north, and we had to fill a large plastic water jug with ocean water, then run around on the sandy dunes with the jug upside-down on one teammate's hand - trying not to lose any water of course - and return the jug (now empty) to the race official in charge of the event. Needless to say, Derek carried the heavy water jug for us! After that, just a short run on the beach and we were finished! It took us 6 1/2 hours to complete this race, and I cried like a baby because I couldn't believe that

it was over and we hadn't quit (especially considering the tough time we had in the ocean). The ocean kayaking was hands down the scariest experience of my life. The whole thing was totally out of my hands; you just can't control the waves. I'm sure you don't need to be told that we're going back next year! Of course we are! We will bring the right kind of kayaks and we'll do better than we did this year. Also, I'm working on my biking, so next year I won't have to ask for a slower pace. This was our last race of the year, but that doesn't mean I'm taking it easy now. No way - I'm lifting weights, running, and biking to prepare for next year! We start in January with the Endurance Race Series at Nantahala Outdoor Center (NOC). A running race (bring trail shoes and an extra pair of socks), a biking race (BYOB), and a kayak race (kayaks provided, or bring your own), 3 separate weekends. Let me know if you want to do one or more of these events, and I'll get you started on your Adventure Racing Odyssey!