

**North Georgia 30-Hour Adventure Race  
Suches, GA  
January 17-19, 2003**

Team AdventureCarolinas.com  
Richard Ridlehuber  
Tim LaRose

Drew Wilson  
Thomas DeMaria (support)



"It feels so good to try so hard and feel so exhausted"

"It feels good to find my limits, then go a little further"

"This is a sport of suffering and pain mixed with high, highs and low, lows and some parts in between."

It was cold, if "cold" can even adequately describe the North Georgia Adventure Race. January 17-19, 2003 brought together 83 teams of 2s and 3s of single gender and co-ed racers. Thursday, the Southeast was blanketed with snow, the Suches, Ga area received about 3 inches, but Mother Nature wasn't through, next came the cold front and near record lows. We had lucked out and gotten a cabin less than 4 miles from the Start/Finish, The Morning Mist Cabin. Other than not having water Friday night/ Sat. morning due to a plumbing problem it was cozy before the race. We all arrived at the cabin around 1pm on Friday, to find already cold temperatures and white snow. After unloading all the non-check-in gear from the vehicles, we made our way to the Registration at the Woody Gap School. The parking area was crowded with vehicles of all types loaded down with bikes and boats of all sorts. We grabbed our packs, gear to go get the gear inspected and check in. It was pretty but we managed to get through the 10 stations within an hour. After that we headed back to the cabin to arrange everything and cook the pre-race meeting at 6:30pm. Race management gave a what to expect, if we didn't already know, due to the weather. Lots of questions were asked and as they became more and more ridiculous, we left. We did one last sort, had to run by the owner's home down the road because we couldn't get any water out of the faucets to fill up our bladders and water storage. When we went to bed around 9:30pm, the thermometer on the porch was hovering at a frigid 12 degrees...it would be colder in the morning!



bikes and paddling crowded in the gym hour. After that we some dinner before good indication of extremely cold ridiculous, we left. the road because we

We had most our gear ready and set the clocks for 3:30am. I slept well except waking up at 2:30 to use the bathroom....I couldn't go back to sleep. I was worrying about how I would deal with the cold and snow. When my first alarm went off at 3:28 I promptly got up and woke everyone. That was the last sleep or rest we'd get for over 24hrs. As we fooled around with breakfast and packing, the excitement/ nervousness built. Would we be able to handle the sub-zero weather? If we biked first would we be able to handle the expected -15 degree windchill.

For safety, we would be carrying sufficient gear to protect us, but just enough to keep us warm while we were moving. We also had a radio, sleeping bag and small stove for emergencies. We were carrying Abooma Traxum GPS units, they didn't benefit us during the race as they were in sealed containers. You can check out our route choices compared to 43 other teams using them at Abooma. The biggest problem was sweating too much on the climbs and then freezing on the downhills and when we stopped briefly to check maps. At the 5am start, Thomas and Richard plotted the UTM's and I had to drive back to the cabin to get some water bottles left behind. It took me about 5 minutes to get up the hill of ice out of the field. Last time I looked at the thermometer reading in the Blazer, it read 3 degrees, Thomas later said by the time he was leaving the Start, it was -1.

As we started out, the first obstacle was getting out of the parking area. It was a short steep hill of ice, we'd already slid down it in the car, with a few seconds of panic as we slid toward the truck stopped in front of us. Everyone had to get off and push their bikes up the hill. Glasses fogged immediately as we started out with nearly every inch of skin covered. I was overdressed as usual and at one early stop had to ditch an outer layer. Also my, thought to be bombproof, Mountain Hardwear Tempest SL pants malfunctioned and had to be ditched as a zipper broke and couldn't be zipped up. Luckily I had a new garment on, Giesseggi Windtex bib tights, A thin windproof thermal barrier then kept my legs comfortable for the next 11 hours of riding in the cold. It never got above 25 degrees, except maybe in a few sunny spots we rode past in the valleys. Other than that, I was

wearing a Speedo swimsuit as underwear instead of cotton then thin bike shorts with the bib-tights. On the top I was wearing a thin wicking undershirt, mid-weight long-sleeve zip shirt and my new, Sierra Designs Wind-pro fleece jacket. Ski gloves on the hands did well for the fingers but the toes were cold and cramped. I had them crammed into my reg. Size 9.5 Shimano M220 shoes, with wicking liner socks, Expedition weight Smartwools, gore-tex oversocks, a toe warmer that didn't work on the outside of the shoe between the neoprene shoe cover and shoe. They were cramped and cold for 12 hours  $\approx$ . We were on snow cover roads for a long time and clipping in to the pedals became increasingly difficult due to ice buildup. The downhill became a measure of freezing windchills and coordinating dangerous ice patches. The fresh untracked snow was easy to ride in or if it were packed down but often it was fresh snow with a few bike tracks criss-crossing. This made for tired sore hands from gripping the handlebars and holding on as the bike continuously fishtailed.

I can honestly say, that the racers at NGAR were the most respectful and helpful of any I have seen. We passed on cp info. early on to a couple teams who we knew had gone past a checkpoint 1 (cp). Others I heard like Team CarolinaAT masters helped a distressed team early on, and others that were generally concerned as to making sure you were doing okay. There is a fine line in Adv. Races of this length and especially in this type weather where racers must be extra aware of their bodies. This is a sport of suffering and pain mixed with high, highs and low, lows and some parts in between. Cp 1 was down a gravel road off the main one we'd been climbing, several teams had gone past it. The bike section, somewhere between 60 & 70 miles, apparently took its toll on nearly 50% of the teams due to mostly cold related problems. At one point between cp1 and 2, we jumped off the road onto a trail that was good for a quarter mile then abruptly ended. Richard did a fine navigating job, we bushwhacked through a creek bottom to pop out on the road we were looking for. We got cp2 and were in 17th of the 83 teams. We started biking again on a better road and were doing well. The sun had begun to warm us up a bit and we still played the game of keeping our bladder hoses from freezing. After a mile or two, I started noticing a bit of shifting from my rear tire. It had a slow leak, apparently that trail we went down had some thorns under the snow. We didn't change it as we thought it was real slow and we may be able to get back to the TA before changing tubes. Eventually after pumping it 2x we decided it was more efficient to replace the tube and go on. We climbed up on this ridgeline on an unimproved road and were riding it for a while when we stopped at a trail parking area and showed the maps to a local and decided we had ridden past it by about 2.5 miles. We missed cp3, due to expecting a manned cp on the road we were pedaling but instead it was off the road up a fire road a couple hundred yards. That was a bit frustrating, not because of the nav. mistake itself (because everyone makes them) but knowing we'd just climbed a long hill and we'd have to go back down, get the cp and then return where we'd already been. In all it probably cost us ~40minutes. At one point we got off the forest road and started down a snow cover trail shrouded by a canopy of trees, reminded me of a tunnel. It was a lot of fun though a bit rough on the hands from gripping so hard. I doubt that many people ride it as within a couple miles we found a lot of trees falls we had to climb over. For the most part it was rideable. CP 4 was easy to find as it was on this trail. We did encounter a woman streaking by us on foot, not naked, but rather running fast. We found the rest of her team 30min. later I guess the girl was the stud on the team as they'd apparently made a mistake and were going to get cp4. At the end of the trail was a formidable obstacle, two logs about 8inches wide were laying across a wide cold creek. It was at about 10yds. wide and covered still with snow & ice. We all took baby-steps inching our way across with our bikes. The other side was a gravel road that was mostly unfrozen and we were back in the lower valleys having ridden about 45-50 miles by now. We got on some paved roads that were mostly devoid of snow and ice to ride along at a brisk pace to cp5. Sometime along this part a woman on a the woman that was running earlier flew by Tim, Richard and I (10hrs. of riding at this point) Her other teammates came along a minute or two later one man towing the other, they were all out of sight within minutes. Just before cp5 I ran out of liquid nourishment. Between Tim and I we had about a 1/3 water bottle left and I think Richard was about out. Luckily, we got to cp 5 where we met Bryan Goble from Atlanta Trailblazers and another volunteer who had bottled water for the racers. CP 6/ TA1 was not too far away. It was getting dark when we started a heinous climb to the point we were walking our bikes due to the condition of the mud, and snow. Apparently many vehicles had to be pushed/ towed out of this area it was so steep from the TA. We pulled into cp6/ TA1 at around 5:50 pm. We'd been mostly riding for ~11.5 hours. The cheers that greeted us were comforting, but not as comforting as hearing that the paddle section had been cancelled due to the lake being frozen. We got to Thomas and our gear and to our surprise next to another support crew of four women who graciously helped us through our transition to hiking. Apparently there wasn't much of a benefit from the paddle section being dropped as the bike section took 2x as long as it had been planned. We were the 17th team into TA1  $\approx$ . They said the biking section was supposed to be 50-60 miles. My computer read 59 but had not worked for a couple hours of the morning, though we added ~5 miles during our bike/ nav. Error fix, we estimate we biked between 65 - 70 miles.

We took in some warm food and hot drinks, we changed into some dry clothes, refilled our food stores and water supplies and in an hour it was time to leave the comfort of our fire and tarp. At ~7pm we were ferried

across part of the Toccoa river by pontoon at the southern end of Blue Ridge Lake to start our hike. We made good progress, passing a couple teams and made our way to cp11, a manned cp at a fire tower station on a steep mtn. At this point, I was starting to have some problems from a foot problem I thought was an isolated event at another 30hr. AR 4 years ago....bursitis in the back of my bony feet/ heels that took over a month to heel enough to wear hard-backed shoes. The hike was estimated at ~25 miles, we had been going well up to cp11 and after another short nav. error that had us hiking up then down and back up a mtn. to cp12. We hit that time in the race when all is quiet, all your doing is watching the trail in front of you putting one painful foot in front of the other.....for hours. This section of the race dialogue is short because I don't have much to say because all we did during those last 3-4 hours was hike and try to sustain energy eating and drinking. I did have one brief elation, I'd stuck a Subway foot long Turkey Breast sandwich on Monterey Cheddar bread with all the trimmings (except mayonnaise and that type) no I wasn't hallucinating that came later! I'd eaten half of it when we'd crossed the river and started the hike and now at ~2:00am it was time for some more. Within 20 minutes my energy level was high again, but feet were hurting badly. The heel pain that worried me most had subsided but that may have been because of the 500mg Tylenol tablets I'd been popping in the last 4 hours. We had just crossed a major road (paved) and were halfway up a tough, steep climb when the voices started. It had been snowing hard with it blowing horizontally for about an hour. I kept thinking I heard women conversing to my left to the point that I kept looking to see if I saw anything. It got real windy and cold with the snow blowing right in our faces. About halfway up the 1000 foot climb, we saw headlamps coming the other way. As the teams approached, we stopped and talked with them, checking their condition and if they needed help. At that point we looked at the map, we had to pull out another one as the trail was running off the page, what we saw was disheartening. We had a long-long way to go, 8 to 10 miles as a quick estimate, which translates into about 5-7 hours as our progress wasn't getting any faster and it appeared there weren't going to be any manned cp's as the next several cps were on trails. After analyzing the Abooma data on Sunday it appears that it took some fast teams that had passed us shortly after cp12, 10+ hours to get to cp14/ TA2. It would have taken us longer! If we kept going we were leaving behind the luxury of a quick exit (that main road we'd crossed was about a mile away or less downhill and was easily accessible to our support crew. Richard took into consideration the condition of the team, the worsening weather, the potential to finish without sustaining major injury and made the statement: "I can't make it that far" and offered to let Drew and Tim keep going as a two man unit. Drew and Tim said that we were a team. Inside I was relieved he'd said holding out for as long as I could, and would have nothing been said, but since it had I didn't object and because my feet were hurting bad (three days later my sore). My situation would likely have gotten worse I could make it to the next TA, let alone the finish 10-around 2:30am, we made the decision to break out the support crew to go pick us up back at the road. Tim, I disappointed at not being able to finish, he was really and put in great efforts, even when he ran back to find cp12 and ran right past it by a couple hundred yards. I feel bad that he couldn't reach his goal but in hindsight it was a good decision. We're healthy and can say we gave it our best and suffered our moneys worth. Right now the unofficial results are that only 8 teams made it to the finish line of the 83 teams that started the race. The race started at 5am, we left out of the Start after plotting the course sometime before 6am and for nearly 22 hours raced with the 1 hour reprieve at TA1.



something as I was tried to keep going had was really relieved feet are still swollen and and I really didn't think 11 hours away. At radio and call in for our believe was a bit strong the entire race

We didn't have long to wait as Thomas drove up in the Blazer to pick us up. We were all crammed inside because the gear had been hastily repacked. Tim was asleep snoring in a matter of minutes, Thomas began to tell us his adventure about the unorganized and difficult TA situations. At the start, they apparently had to let one vehicle go at a time and get a running start to make it up the icy hill. And at TA1, the steep road we'd pushed our bikes up had gotten several vehicles stuck and made for some hairy times for Thomas in the 2wd Blazer.

I want to thank Tony & Beth for an outstanding course, the volunteers and supporters for their assistance, my teammates, we got along as best we could under the circumstances, Thomas DeMaria for supporting my team once more in a fashion I can't imagine could be surpassed, and my wife for letting me have one more try at it!✍

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## Snow, cold make adventure course grueling

By [SCOTT BERNARDE](#)  
***Atlanta Journal-Constitution Staff Writer***

**Suches** -- The moonlit snow cover on the surrounding peaks of the Blue Ridge Mountains glowed fluorescent blues just before sunrise Sunday morning, a beautiful reminder of a late-week winter storm that covered the area with 3 inches of the white stuff.

Inside the Woody Gap School gymnasium, however, participants of the North Georgia Adventure Race were using words like "grueling," "frosty," and "flat-out hard" to describe the 90-mile race that incorporated biking, hiking and orienteering.

Just finishing was an accomplishment. It's the essence of adventure racing, they say, and despite the coldest temperatures since 2000, the gym was full of smiling, chapped faces.

"I swear I was in Colorado or Switzerland. There was so much snow everywhere," said Shannon Greenhill of Atlanta, who teamed with Duane Patin of Dahlonega and Brandon Patterson of Cumming to win the race in just over 24 hours. "What was neat about it was that it was so unexpectedly cold. You never see weather like this in the South."

Said Patterson: "Cold is an understatement of what it was like."

Organizers and racers expected cold and precipitation, but Mother Nature threw them a nasty change-up. Temperatures measured below zero on some thermometers when the race started at 5 a.m. Saturday, and it didn't get above freezing until well after the racing was done Sunday afternoon. The accompanying snow, ice and wind made conditions treacherous, tearing up equipment, slowing progress to a slippery crawl and freezing water bottles.

Only eight of 79 teams completed the course inside the 30-hour time limit, and about 10 other teams even made it through the night. Despite the extreme conditions, only one case of hypothermia and one case of frostbite was reported. Another racer with heart condition complained of chest pains but checked out OK at a local hospital.

Organizers had predicted a winning time of 20 to 22 hours, and that was even before ice build-up on Blue Ridge Lake canceled the canoe portion of the race. As a result, racers biked about 50 miles, hiked about 25, then biked another 15.

"It was almost like biking and hiking in sand," said Chris Hartsfield, the only competitor from Suches. His team, Team American Legion, was the last to break 30 hours; the trio rolled in around 10:30 a.m. "It takes a lot of energy to do it."

Greenhill's team, Adventurers Anonymous, which won \$800 for their efforts, had a close run-in with two passing motorists on an icy stretch of road but escaped harm.

"We just hit a patch of ice. I went sliding down the pavement 40 or 50 feet on my back. Shannon had no place to go," said Patin, an Army Ranger. "There was a lot of ice out there. That patch was just extra slippery."

Jay Scott and Jim Guthrie of Marietta, who made up the Cycle Works/Trek Team NADS (North Atlanta Dirt Scorchers), had a litany of cold-related problems en route to second place.

"Two broken chains, rear hubs frozen, blown shock, broken seat," said Guthrie, 44, who used duct tape to fix his broken shock absorber. "On ice and snow, you can take the normal exertion level and double it."

A quick snowstorm around 3 a.m. Sunday gave racers another frosty taste.

"It was incredible. You could see the full moon, and then all of sudden the clouds came up and it started snowing," said Scott, 44. "It was snowing so hard you couldn't face it. It was blowing horizontal."

David Cook, 32, of Dunwoody admitted he was ready to quit, but Team Mighty Dogs teammates Vicki Mow of Decatur and Ardie Olson of Cumming kept him going. Team Mighty Dogs finished fourth. The challenge of finishing was further incentive.

"It's the type of thing that if somebody tells you can't do it, you'll try even harder to do it," he said. "It's faith to keep moving forward one step at a time."

Going the distance was the only consolation for Team Evolution, which arrived at the gymnasium 9 minutes late. "We could have jumped in the meat wagon [quit] at 5 o'clock this morning, but we wanted to come across the line," said Jonathan Neely of Randolph, N.J. "When you have put 24 hours into something, though, what's five or six more?"