

Final Chapter - My view while crossing a beaver dam with my bike on my back!

Its simple – We did it! We are **full course** Wilderness Traverse finishers!!!

We finished the story – The End!

Read the rest for my view on how we got to this point, note I saved any spoilers for the end.

I guess you can't recap a race that took us 26hrs and 32mins (plus a 1hr penalty) and three attempts to collect our belt buckles in just two lines. So let me take you back to the beginning of the story. It was the summer of 2021, two teammates on my softball team were participating in their first Wilderness Traverse that year. Every week I would listen to their training experiences, and then their attempt at WT 2021. I will leave the details of their race for them to tell their story, but the takeaway is a team that is not bonded does not finish Wilderness Traverse. Regardless, I was so eager and wanted to be involved. Thankfully my biggest supporter pushed my name forward. With their sights set on doing WT again Margret and Amy let it be known they needed two new teammates. In came Katelynn and I and eventually MARRISA to replace Amy. TEAM - NARLY There was born! ☺

Chapter 1 – 2022

Here we go, we were so excited and determined that we were going to accomplish this! We all went in having some experience in the different disciplines. We did a lot of team training that summer. We were confident and naïve all at the same time. We started strong and we were moving along nicely. We had a decent bike leg, albeit with a few bumps but still finished in a decent time. We were trekking strong, we made the night lake crossing/swim. We began aiming for the paddle leg, but somewhere along the way we got lost in the darkness. As a result, we went from moving quickly to bleeding hour after hour. Try as we might we couldn't right the wrong. We were stuck on some random rock along some random lake in the darkness of the night. We sat in disbelief that the end of our first attempt was upon us. We never turned on each other, we shared the last of our food, shared our thoughts, then took out one of our gps watches and found our way home. When we finally made the Paddle TA we had to tell the staff that we were out of the race. As we waited for a ride home, we found a note left in our bin. Our cheerleaders had waited until the wee hours of the morning but departing several hours before. We may have lost the skip in our step that night, but we were not defeated! I won't lie I took this very hard, but quickly reloaded and set my sights on 2023.

Chapter 2 – 2023,

We trained very hard over the winter building more fitness, did a lot more NAV practicing both during the day and at night. In came Erin to replace MARRISA who badly rolled her ankle. We came back with focus, and we were ready to execute our plan. We moved from leg to leg nicely and with only minor hiccups. Any errors in NAV were quickly caught and fixed. The only issue we had was the deep muddy rutted ATV trails. The muck slowed us to hike a bike many times and eventually made us miss the time cut off by only a few minutes. This was a blessing in disguise as had we attempted the trek, we ultimately may have never made it back to the finish. In the end we took the explorers course finish with regret but calm all at the same time. We were WT finishers, and we felt like we belonged.

Chapter 3 – 2024.

We trained even harder, we did more NAV, we even did recon of the course, and we added a new teammate to the original core three. In a late addition to the team Ben joined us to bring the team back up to four. My training load was very high, well past my breaking point. I spent a ton of money (physio, chiro, and RMT) on keeping my breaking body in top shape. Did this increase load help I honestly don't

think it did. This is actually a sticking point for me. I am not getting younger and my team is getting better. I know I am fit and still have it, but I know I am losing power and speed. My wife and team are probably tired of hearing this, but the curtain call is looming. I know it's not today and maybe not tomorrow but, someday they are going to have to tell me its time to take a bow. But frack! That's not happening any time soon. Ha - I went off on my aging rant again.

The week before the race was not perfect for me either, it was wrought with some undisclosed health concerns (no it's not my shoulder) and some sleepless nights. Turns out the stress of last six months just disappeared as easily as it appeared on that last brain scan, but that's the life of driving on the road of hope but plan for the rest. So to say I wasn't at 100% is true, but I had one shot and I wasn't about to let it go.

We arrived at the Airbnb locked and loaded. We eagerly checked in at race HQ, finalized our bins and head off for some restless sleep. In the morning, we were the first team to drop their bins – damn we were ready and not fooling around this time. To say that the team was detailed driven this year is an understatement. Katelyn and I were ready to plot the route. We were first in line again to get the maps. We plotted our route, had times all figured out. So off to the start line we went.

The prologue was very strange as all the top teams seemed to get lost. How could the fastest and best NAVs not be back already!? We waited and wonder but they eventually made their way in, and so did Ben. We were off on leg 1, and then on to the bikes for leg 2. We took on those dreaded zig zags in Torrance Barrens and veered to the left on top of a one of those darn Canadian Shield bald rocks. Damn the trail we needed went to the right. Once we had figured out we were on the wrong side of the marsh, we hurled down the side of mountain (ok cliff but it was steep) crossed a beaver damn with our bikes on our back, and then had to scabble back up the other side. At this point I was feeling a bit lightheaded from not taking in enough food but it wasn't bad. I was able to get back into the game, weakened perhaps but able to keep going. We were happy to be off the bikes.

Looming large was a 34km paddle. We charged ahead in the canoes and made up some lost time. We reached the dock, out came my famous Woo, to be echoed by Leighann who was volunteering with Renae at the TA. A quick change of shoes, a dry shirt and off we went into the night hike. This was going to be our make or break of the race and we knew it. Katelynn's Nav kept us on course and rocketing towards the evil night river crossing. Every time we lost the trail, we scrambled to find it. Every time our energy dipped, Margret offered coffee beans, or tried to tell jokes. They may have been funny, they may not have, I was just trying to stay focused. Oh oh - where is the sportident, we won't disclose who dropped it (note – it wasn't me this time). What now!? I said, "there is no way were are looking for it, forget lets keep going". In the end we got a 1h penalty. Yes – NARly There, got an official AR penalty. Honestly – I think it's pretty damn cool! Then came the river crossing/swim! To be honest it was kind of uneventful (well unless you hear me screaming in the gopro footage). The water was actually kind of warm and Richard and his team had soup, coffee, hot chocolate and I later heard beer (it's still carb loading people). We told the volunteers at the CP about the lost item, and then once again set out in our wet clothes. The only way to keep the chill out is to keep the body moving!

We finished the night trek in amazing time and were back on schedule and maybe a little bit ahead. Another quick change into some warm clothes and off we went on the bikes. There was still lots of night sky to deal with and we had to go back thru those evil zig zags. Eventually the sun came up like it always does and our mood was all business. There was no taking any chances, we still had work to do. That was until we had a bike mechanical. Margret's rear hub was loose and the wheel would just spin. Off came

the wheel, we looked at it. We think we did something but I don't know if we really did. Another km down the trail and the pedals were spinning again. A plan was hatched – we would run and tow the bike the rest of the way home. Turns out in the end, the hub stuck and Margret was able to ride, albeit in a fixed gear, but she was riding.

I don't know where the minds of everyone else was at but the final leg was belt buckle or bust for me. We had lots of time but the final 3 CPs could also just as easily finished the day for us. The third last CP was rather hard. It had me worried that the last two would be just as hard. Turns out it was just a washed out road crossing away that stood in our way – Thanks mister beaver for yet again wetting our feet. We crossed the road in almost knee deep water not once but two times. And with that, we only had one CP to go. It wasn't hard but remember we were well into 25 hours of racing at this point. We got the check point and nothing was said. Clearly though, things were different, we were going to get those damn belt buckles, and we knew it. I don't know if it was being exhausted or the euphoria but my legs completely drained out and it was a struggle to get back on my bike and make the final push home.

It took me a few minutes but I did get that final wind. The mood lightened and a massive sigh of relief washed over me. The team fanned four wide on our bikes, and we soaked in the moment. We came into the camp and we fanned four wide again and crossed the finish line!

WE DID IT! WE FINISHED THE STORY

IT TOOK A COUPLE OF TRYs BUT WE NOW OWN WT BELT BUCKLES! Woo

Queue the full champagne celebration! I wasn't letting this moment slip without an extra special moment. I had stashed a bottle under the truck seat just in case, and gave instructions to bring out if we were full course finishers. Leighann had volunteered at the finish in the early am, so she was at the finish waiting. She had gotten permission to keep the bottle cold for us with the race finishers chocolate milk.

Pop goes the cork for a team toast and champagne shower. All that was left was for Leighann to present us with our belt buckles!

Yes it's just another race medal but somehow this is the sweetest of them all! We accomplished this as team. We trained hard, we persevered and we accomplished our goal!

THE END

Credits:

Team NARly There

Marrisa, Erin and Ben,

The Core; Katelynn and Margret

Race Volunteers- Leighann, Renae and McKenna

Personal Support – Leighann – I don't do what I do with out her love and support!

Sponsor- Compass Estates

Epilogue:

What's next for NARly There? NARly will be back that's a given!

Whats next for me?

I have been billing this year's race as the year we finish the story. For me that meant being a full course finisher and a taking home a belt buckle. This never once meant I was leaving AR. As some of you may know I am a some what complete person and there is still lots left in this aging, slowing, decaying body. So I am planning on being back at next years WT and taking home another belt buckle. If you finished ahead of us this year watch out because we will be breathing down your necks next year.

In breaking news I am going international! NARLy is teaming with Great Lake AR to take on Roots Stock Racing's – Two Rivers course in Pennsylvania at the end of Oct. I am excited to be racing internationally and expanding my race horizons. I look forward to new race challenges and hope to learn a lot from patterning with such a veteran team.

Until next time WT