

Wilderness Traverse 2017 – Team Bushmen LTD Race report – during and after...

I entered WT this year as part of a new team for me – Team Bushmen LTD. After very much looking forward to getting out there with Adam and Jorge as part of a 3 person male team, we got off to a very solid start and were in a good position after the opening trek stage. The beginning of the first bike leg also went quite well until we hopped on to the Seguin Trail. Not long after that point, my teammate Adam yelled up to the two of us to circle back to him due to a mechanical – unfortunately in this case a snapped rear derailleur hanger with no spare on hand. I'm a big believer that attitude is everything, so staying very positive about this 'challenge' we got to work converting the bike into a single speed, and from my perspective was still confident we could keep moving forward and finish despite a tonne of biking still to be done. The single speed plan really didn't work out very well as the chain kept skipping into a higher cog making the chain incredibly tight and hard to pedal at all. The bike had rear suspension and even with the rear shock locked out there was some rear axle movement that caused constant issues. With lots of towing and a few more chain breakages along the way, we managed to complete the first bike leg but had fallen behind most teams.

Still positive and having a good time despite this challenge, we had a great second trek leg moving fast and nailing our navigation thanks to the great map work by Jorge. We got to the next TA to start the long bike leg having got back ahead of a whole bunch of teams and set out to try to cover the 80k bike leg in time to get onto the paddle leg. Remarkably Adam's chain never broke again, but it became increasingly hard to pedal at all so we struggled to move at any sort of pace through the muddy and bumpy trails where we really couldn't tow. We got to a point after spending some time trying to sort out the right trail to take to get to CP11 where we had to accept defeat given how much further we would need to go to hit the next TA essentially taking turns pushing one bike. So we were able to get a drive back to Tapattoo from a volunteer and at least look forward to getting some sleep that night, unlike all those still out racing.

Just because the race for us was over didn't mean the adventure was over for the weekend... Once back at Tapattoo I offered to volunteer to pick up racers dropping out if needed. Not long after that, Barb asked if I could head to the paddle TA at Pete's Place to drive a team back that had dropped out. I was hoping to get to see that TA, and to check out Healey Lake Road, which as I had expected was quite a fun drive in the middle of the night with absolutely no cars on the road. After passing a few teams still riding along the road towards that TA, off in the distance I saw a fire just off the road. As I got closer I saw three rear red flasher lights, so knew for sure this was a WT team. As I slowed down to pull over and check in to see how they were doing, I was startled by a man completely soaked in mud running out into the middle of the road waving his illuminated cell phone at me.

The team I had come across, Puzzled by Nature, had gotten onto the wrong trail trying to make their way down to Healey Lake Road and had gotten way off course. They also had some major bike issues and one teammate with an injured leg for good measure. Andy, a local cottager that Bob had approached before the race about placement of CP11 on his property, had been watching the race progress online that night, and noticed that this team had taken a wrong turn. When he saw that they were way off track, and then had not moved in over 30 minutes, he jumped to action, heading out on his ATV to try to help them.

Andy was able to find them and got them onto the right track to get down to the road, but in the process got his ATV stuck and then broke his winch trying to get it un-stuck. So out to the road he

trekked with the team, soaking wet and freezing cold like they all were, as the temperature at this point was just above 0. With the team changed into their dry clothes and doing OK by their fire, I drove the extremely muddy and cold Good Samaritan back to his house wrapped up in a tarp, and then looped back and picked up the team at the fire to bring them back to Tapattoo given they had decided to pull out. I was happy I could do my part to help out, and then very much enjoyed actually getting some sleep in a warm hotel room that Saturday night. Can't wait to get out there again next year!