

My view from the back of the boat!

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Team 3 – NARly There

I will start with the conclusion and then you can decide if you want the whole story (it's a long read)!

Well, here we are post [Wilderness Traverse](#) 2023 and we did what we set out to do! We are now ranked Wilderness Traverse finishers! Woo

Thank you to our sponsor [Compass Estates](#), our race day supporters (Leighann Carella and Renae), and to you the dot watchers! Looking at my phone later and seeing all of my friends chatting through the night was so amazingly heartwarming!

Let's be clear - We FINISHED, we accomplished something that I personally wanted so badly! As we crossed the line - my exhausted look completely hid the euphoria that was raging inside of me! Read to the end for that inside info

The buildup - one heart-wrenching failed attempt in 2022! I won't lie I took this very hard, but quickly reloaded and set my sights on 2023.

The training - long days and nights building fitness, endurance, technique, route planning, and more navigation training.

The prologue - 2 km trail run. A trail run, run by only one team member. I lost the rock paper scissors contest and got what I secretly wanted. I wanted to go toe to toe, elbows to elbows with some of the greatest adventure racers around. I love the adrenaline in my veins and it was a rush! Thankfully it was only 2km, just enough to make it fun but not long enough to blow my engine 2km into a 126km race. It would take a good half hour after to bring my breath and heart rate back down.

The Paddle - 34km / 6hrs 4mins with 4kms of portaging. We found ourselves mid-pack to start the day as we put the boats in the water. We were staying with the competition to start. Within minutes of leaving the beach my canoe seat broke. There was never any question of stopping or turning around. The question was how are we going to make this work for the rest of the paddle! After the first portage, my teammates lent me their packs to use as a seat because that's what great teammates do. With the leaves turning colors right before our eyes, it was a perfect time to be out on the water. Thankfully we were only one of a handful of teams that found the secret passage and avoided the long paddle around the island. The funny thing was - we even had a local cottager get in his boat and speed over to us asking if we were lost! He was concerned that we went the wrong way because everyone else went the other way. The course had 4km of portages that were equally shared between the teammates. As we approached the boat takeout, my upper left arm was seizing - I blame the awkward/broken seat. We were happy to be on dry ground again and raced up the road to the transition area. As we approached I

let out my signature Woo and it was answered by the greatest race supporter ever with her Woo in response. Having Leighann Carella in the TA was so motivating! We were pumped to see so many teams still in the TA. A quick transition had us out and hunting down the next CP and the competition.

The First trek - 20km / 7hrs. As we went out on the trek our upper bodies rested and eventually recovered as we went along. With our stronger-than-expected paddle, we were able to travel farther in the daylight hours. But soon the day turned to night and we slowed to make sure we stayed on course! We were met with some epic rock cliffs and water crossings (oops somebody dropped a floating bridge right in the spot we wanted to cross - perfect)! The moon was bright, the stars were out and we kept on trucking through the night. We were gaining on teams and super motivated to find ourselves neck and neck with more experienced teams. We hit the next TA to be met again by our full race support crew making it just as we were about to leave (seems we were moving just too fast - lol).

The Bike - 51km / 7hrs 7mins. Coming into the TA we were so far ahead of the 4 a.m. cutoff time, but we still had a 5 a.m. Cutoff time to make! Again we found ourselves neck and neck with other teams. We were trading spots with each other as we took turns slowing for some sort of reason (lights, gears, nature breaks, or the need to check navigation). Our bodies we definitely starting to slow but our spirits were still very high. We did briefly miss a turn in the dark but we quickly got back on course. Fears of not making the 5 a.m. were looming. Then boom we hit a massive hike a bike bog and we were definitely out of the running for the 5 a.m. expedition course cutoff. A quick break to regroup and recharge our spirits had us back into TA4. It was supposed to be a short 7km to the TA5 but it was painstakingly muddy and hilly! We had mud in places we didn't even know we had places. But we persevered and we inched closer to the finish. The thoughts of being a Wilderness Traverse 2023 finisher was rushing in but the hurt in my legs and the mud/stones in my shoes helped keep the rush of emotion down or in check.

The final push home - 7km/5hrs 47mins! The sun was out, and we had 8 hours to get ourselves home. Not so fast, did you get that this 7km trek took us close to 6 hours? What started as pure euphoria and laughter, was quickly scrubbed, We were hit with constant mud bogs and some so deep somebody abandoned their ATV right in the middle of it, and I didn't even mention the constant elevation changes. We were tired and just wanted to keep our feet dry as long as possible. I tried to keep the mood light and even offered a friendly competition - the first person to the top of the next hill gets to shower first. All four of us tried, but none of us were able to lift the pace at all. With one final bushwhack to take us home, we were still strong with our eyes on the prize. Not so fast this bushwhack was filled with steep elevation changes that sucked the last little bit of energy and motivation from our bodies. This short bushwack was taking every last bit of energy and focus that the team had left. Then finally we heard sounds of civilization from our right. So we skirted the massive cliff right in front of us and elected to walk the shoreline home. Screw it - we didn't care that our feet were soaked, we could see the beach!!!!!!!!

The finish - we reached the beach, rounded the corner and our race day supporters were there and going crazy! Not to mention all the other teams and organizers that were around cheering us home! As any great team does, we fanned 4 wide crossed the line, and checked in at the finish. We were now Wilderness Traverse finishers!!!!!!! Mission accomplished.

The emotion - I said earlier, I was hit hard by not finishing the year before! So suffice it to say, this time the emotions were completely reversed. Thankfully my emotions were easily hidden in my stunned/tired expression! After a few minutes of holding it in - I moved away and took a few seconds for myself. I sat on a Muskoka chair and just let the rush of pure happiness rush right through me. The Nature Boy had to quietly let out a few Woos. We worked hard as a team and we had done something that we all wanted so bad! We were WT finishers! AR is a team sport and now we are officially part of a group of incredibly talented athletes.

The aftermath - was just as satisfying as I had been dreaming about all year! A post-race beer with my team from our new finishers mug! A quick shower and nap were in order (it was hard thou as my body literally twitched/jolted from exhaustion). Then came an incredible team dinner as we recounted an amazing race from each other's perspective and the perspective of our Race Day supporters.

What a physically exhausting but magical weekend with 3 amazing teammates and 2 race-day supporters! [Katelyn Giesbrecht](#) Nav was spot on, [Margaret Stefels](#) grit and determination was unstoppable this year, and what an amazing addition [Sunday Erin](#) was to the team with her never-quit and calming influence.

Side note - I passed my exam (level 4) which was limiting my training. Exams are done - no need to ever cut short a ride/run again! Level 4s in 4 years - woo! Which leads to.....

What's next - I have one more rung to climb at Wilderness Traverse I promise I will be back albeit older but stronger, leaner, faster, and with more Nav training completed. I may not have the best genetics but I promise you will not outwork me!

Final words and I can't ever say this enough - I wouldn't be able to do what I do without the incredible support of my amazing wife! Thank you [Leighann Carella](#)!

Whatever it takes'
Cause I love the adrenaline in my veins
I do whatever it takes