

## **Wilderness Traverse '23**

### **Long winded race report...**

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**Team 30 – Attack From Above**

[Chad Spence](#), [Julie Parent](#) , [Scott Weersink](#) and myself  
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For the 4th time since 2018, Attack from Above went in with a different team configuration. Although most of the time we have had the core of Chad, Julie and myself. Earlier this year, Jay [Jason Livingstone](#) was keen to join our team and we were equally as stoked to have him race with us. With his awesome skillset, positive demeanour and workhorse mentality, we knew he'd be a great teammate.

Unfortunately, a few months before he was dealing with a nagging injury that didn't seem to be getting better so he had to opt out. This is when we approached Warriors Scott Weersink (previous WT winner) who Chad recently raced Challenge the Shield with and all 3 of us have raced against and trained with previously. Scott's reputation of being a speedy, hardworking and ultimate teammate made it an easy choice for a 4th especially cause he can navigate, shred on the bike and offered us old folks some youthful exuberance.

Leading up to this year's Wilderness I had some ups/downs with my training. I was still putting in decent volumes but ever since I did La Cloche in August, I've had various stomach issues, some tightness in my chest and just lacked any umph while out there. A few times in early September, I contemplated telling my teammates I wasn't going to race because I knew how strong they were and I didn't want to slow anyone down especially given the field of top teams. That said, I really wanted race with our newest teammate and with WT only once a year, I knew I would regret missing it. I was open with Chad/Julie about my concerns going into it and they understood what I was going through but gave me confidence that I would be okay.

The morning of WT seems a lot more relaxed with the 10 am start and with a few hours to prep maps and get our gear bins/bikes sorted, I think most of us just wanted to get it started. Especially with the amazing forecast of mid 20C and sunshine for late September. I was amazed looking around the pavilion of people during pre-race prep. Everyone looks like they could be the next WT winners. Lots of map discussions, gear checks, fueling and grins as we all seemed eager for what was ahead. I couldn't help but think of all of my AR friends who would be participating on other teams and how they would fare. I am lucky to have so many liked minded friends nearby to train with and love to see so many of them out racing. It was hard not to get choked up listening to long time AR friend [Adrian Makurat](#) have a discussion about what him and his family have experienced since the unthinkable tragedy with his wife Caroline earlier this summer. He had some very sound and wise advice to everyone racing specifically the newer teams how to approach it and look at it as 150km but small sections and take it step by step. Very inspiring to see Adrian and his teammates ready to race along with

over 70 total teams (20 rookie teams (most who have no idea what to expect from a “Bob” course)).

### Leg #1/#2 (Prologue Sprint and Paddle/Portage)

The start of the race could have been pretty ugly redline for me with a 2km sprint to begin most teams were relieved to hear that it would only be one teammate running the loop and we were pretty stoked to have the eager, speedy Scott to participate. Out of 70 runners, he got back to the boats first?! and we were off to the paddle. Although, we got onto the paddle first, we knew that a handful of teams would soon be with us and likely pass us. Coming into this race, I think Julie, Scott and I had paddled a total of once for about 12km in the previous month. That was a little different than Chad who was coming off of Muskoka River X a few weeks prior when he and his teammate came 2<sup>nd</sup> after 150km. Unfortunately, for Scott and I, he couldn't paddle our boats as well. 😊

When we hit our first portage coming off of Raven Lake there were 3 other teams around us (Raid Pulse, Bend and Peaks & Trails). Within a minute of being off of the water, we were all canoe whacking around trying to find our way. It wasn't pretty as we tried to find a portage route that didn't seem to exist. After some climbing and more canoe whacking we finally found the trail and made our way to the next lake. We traded spots with the other 3 teams over the next two Cps (thanks to volunteers Richard, Tim, Aubrey, Dave C) trying our best to stay with the lead groups knowing that inevitably we would get passed. P&T are especially beasts on the water and in the past have passed us as if we were going backwards so we figured this would happen soon enough. Despite the pace, I couldn't help but take in the beauty around the lakes. The leaves were as spectacular as I've ever seen in a race and the rocky outcrops and cliffs were also pretty stunning. Definitely my favourite WT paddle that I can recall. Most of the portages, had the teams pushing through in single file and it wasn't until one of the final longer portages that had a decent climb where Scott decided to make a move. He was getting antsy being “stuck” behind a line of boats so he took it upon himself to pass all of the boats off trail to get ahead. My head was down at the back of the pack carrying our gear and when I looked up I could barely see his 1990s Adidas shorts now at the front and right with Chad. I had to sprint up to the front to catch them and get on the water as the first two boats. Somehow over the next few lakes we managed to stay in front and maybe for the first time ever, I actually felt quite strong with a pretty good rhythm coming into the first TA. Of course that lead may not have even been a minute over 2<sup>nd</sup> place as the other 3 teams were right behind coming off of the water. I am not sure if I ever had calories in my PFD bladder before but it definitely seemed to help. We had a short trek into our first TA after dropping the boats and made a very quick transition downing a drink and shoving a samosa into my mouth before heading onto the Leg #2 Trek. Good to see Simpy and Jay (who weren't able to race) volunteering at the TA.

### Leg #3 (Trek)

If we had started this leg on a bushwhack maybe our stomachs would have been more agreeable but with a trail run to start on some pretty nice trails, I could feel my stomach turn pretty quickly as we tried to keep a decent pace while climbing up to a few beautiful lookouts. It was obvious that we were working in a bit of a deficit after that first paddle (never easy to fuel properly on the boats especially in that unexpected heat). Not too

long into the trek, Julie got sick. She had downed a Boost (usual go-to for her) at the TA but it didn't sit well. All 3 teams quickly passed us offering support and encouragement. We reminded ourselves that it was a long race and we needed to take care of each other to be able to battle to the end. Julie felt a little bit better and despite our insistence to keep walking for a while she was okay to try to move faster again. None of us felt great and the more we ran the worse my stomach felt, I actually had hoped that we would get off trail soon so either I could quickly use the washroom or slow our pace. Unfortunately, I didn't make it much further till I had to stop for an emergency while my teammates waited patiently and checked our position. Amazingly, when we got to CP6 we had made up some time and we right back with Bend and P&T. On our approach to CP7, I had it in my head that once we found the Frost trails we had rode in on a few years back, that we could just follow trails back to the TA. We found the trails and ran a decent pace on them, unfortunately, we spent a little too much time on them and found ourselves too far NW and that was obvious when we hit a lookout high above this marsh when Chad realized ah crap we had gone too far and we needed to be south of that marsh. We descended quickly but still needed to bushwhack across the marsh and were off trail before we hit the trails that led us back to Hwy #35 and the TA near the Frost Center. The final 2km my stomach was pretty close to exploding so I definitely held us back. I knew there would be facilities at the TA which I barely made it to. [Alisha Jennison](#) was waiting anxiously with Wanda at the TA and broke the news to us that the top 3 teams had left there over 25 minutes ago. DOH?! I took a few minutes to use the facilities and Alisha would be the first to point out that we looked rough. The good news was that it was time to bike and the next leg should be pretty quick. I quickly shoved more food/drink down my gullet and we were off.

#### Leg #4 (Bike)

We had done sections of this next bike back in 2019 so I remembered it being pretty fast but we had to get through the "bramble" and "mud pits" first. I should have known if Bob labelled Bramble on the map there was a reason. Julie and I came out of it looking like we'd been attacked by a wolverine. Thankfully, it was only a few kms and shortly after as the daylight disappeared we were on some pretty fast gravel and we worked well together pace lining for the next 18km to the B trail which would take up to CP8. As the temps cooled, I started to feel much better and was happy to do my part on these bike sections. As we turned NW onto the B trail we expected the worst but were relieved to find a great trail that almost resembled a cottage road. I enjoyed this section as we passed a number of people car camping having nice fires in the early evening but we also had no idea how far behind the lead 3 teams we were and there had been no signs of anyone behind us. At one point we turned off of a main road onto an ATV trail and met a pretty large group of guys having a bonfire in the middle of the trail. I can just imagine how rowdy they got over the next few hours as more and more teams rode past?! We pace lined where we could and it wasn't until the final kms on a crappy portage trail where we hit the real mud and our pace slowed to a snail's crawl. We knew that Bob would have mud for us somewhere but thankfully it was really limited to this area. Coming into the TA we were greeted by a few gorillas (or was it just one?) 😊 Thanks to the Makurat boys and Jacek for being out at this remote TA and offering the usual comic relief/encouragement (or was it ?!). We got out of our muddy bike shoes

and headed out in the dark for what we figured would be the toughest section of the race.

#### Leg #5 (Trek)

I like tough nighttime treks when Chad is navigating. He excels at it and as Scott commented, I will gladly race with you anytime as long as Chad is leading the way and that's how I feel too. 😊 We moved pretty quick going towards CP#10 but weren't able to find a portage trail that we had hoped to use. Using bearings and lots of bushwhacking we made our way in between two lakes near the CP but got caught in some impenetrable marshes that slowed us to a crawl. I was surprised to see two volunteers at this CP which appeared to be in the middle of nowhere but they told us it was pretty spot in the daylight. From there we decided to head almost directly south so we could use the lake as a handrail west towards CP11 which was at the base of a cliff. We avoided the Out of Bounds cabin which we heard a dog barking from (apparently this guy wasn't too impressed with teams getting close to his property as the race went on). We nabbed the CP and had intended to keep going west along the shore. After a few meters and seeing the cliffs descend into the water, Chad exclaimed "This is a trap" and we decided to backtrack a bit before ascending up to the Moose Trail which ran East-West above us. It took us much longer to hit that trail than we thought and at that point we had adjusted our bearing to be heading NW back towards the lake. It was around midnight and we had discussed swimming back to Makurat basecamp which had been encouraged by Rob but we also didn't love the idea of getting onto our bikes after a cold swim. When we hit the water, we figured it was a 150m swim across (in fact it was more like 350m based on Grit racing doing it a few hours later) so we opted to hug the south shoreline until it narrowed. We really didn't want to go around the whole bay to the west so we decided a short 50m swim to cut the corner made sense. Thankfully for the tall folks on the team we only had to wade across, this was not the case for Julie who said it was up to her chin. Regardless it was a good decision as it saved us some time and we got to see some fireworks in our honour. It was also nice that Rob had paddled out to make sure we crossed safely (of course offering a few typical jabs to boot). When we got to the TA we were told that the 2nd/3rd place teams had left around 40 minutes before with Raid Pulse leaving before that. We weren't looking forward to the "short" 7km bike section which Bob had estimated an hour minimum to complete.

#### Leg #6 Bike

And there it was, the Bob bike everyone was waiting for. It may have only been 3-4km section but it was SH\*T. Bike shops everywhere probably give him a cut for their profits on everyone's post race bike maintenance. 😊 Thankfully it was a short distance albeit not very fast at all as we ended up walking our bikes through most of the unrideable mud. Coming into the next TA, it was great to see a smiling but shivering Alisha who was setup at the final station with Denise, Jay L and the Steeles. We were relieved to know we had only one section left but with the top 3 teams well ahead of us we just wanted to make sure that we didn't make any silly errors over this next section which we knew would be difficult.

#### Leg #7 Trek

We left the TA pretty quickly but we were far from rushing as we hit the dirt path heading towards Sunken Lake. Chad, Julie and I had raced this section two years prior and we hit a wall of deadfall just south of this area that may have been one of the slowest sections (other than the Abenaki at Untamed New England). The nav was bang on and we moved forward but we definitely didn't have any extra umph. Our goal at this point was to complete the section as clean as we could nav wise for a 4th place finish. After a long bushwhack leaving the northside Little Sunken Lake we surprisingly came out to the road. We thought we had been on a bearing south of the next lake but had veered a little left which was okay because we knew where we were and only had a few kms to the finish. We had a quick discussion about running but none of us were feeling great so decided to walk it in and reminisced about the previous 19 hours of racing. As we approached the finish line we were greeted by a few people exclaiming "Wow, what a finish, you made it so close" Bend only got in 10 minutes ago?? Umm what? How was that possible? Needless to say that information surprised us and we did one of those "shoulda/coulda/wouldas" but we were also pretty content with our efforts and the end result. We reminded ourselves of what we had learned before. Anything can happen while out there so if you can try to keep the foot on the gas, do so. That said, you need to have lots of fuel to be able to do that so easier said than done.

Overall, I was extremely proud of our teams efforts over this hammerfest of a race. We were by ourselves from the end of Leg #2 all the way to to the end and we pushed hard throughout. Chad's nav was dialled as always. He is an absolute beast on the paddles & portages and his speed off trail seems crazy at times. Julie had an exceptional race. She was so fast on her feet and despite being a foot shorter than her other teammates kept a torrid pace even after she was sick. It's always amazing to watch her spin out those climbs with ease. Scott was as amazing as advertised. He carried a heavy pack throughout with most of the team gear and some from teammates. He was eager, keen and kept the mood fun. For me, I need to figure out my stomach issues cause there is definitely something going on but I was happy overall and pretty proud of myself on that paddle.

Congrats to Peaks & Trails for their 3rd win in a row. It's amazing to think with the teams in these races that they've had Bob the Beaver 3 yrs in a row now. They excel in all aspects. Raid Pulse was my early pick cause they just seemed so strong on that first trek. They had a decent lead going into that final trek but P&T staying north of Sunken Lake definitely helped as RP got bottled up in the horrible deadfall. Bend was always strong and I always think with their team, the longer the race the more you need to watch out cause they are so fast in those TAs and make few errors overall. It was awesome to see all of the other full/short course finishers and exciting to see the first full course finish for an all female team (Uterati / Outdoor Research led by Una) and the youngest team ever to participate and finish the Explorers Course. A scary moment happened for one of our friends Kelly (Spinning Out of Control) with only a few km from the finish. While navigating through a particularly dense section with lots of deadfall, she had the top of a dead tree fall 15 feet and hit her on the head. It was scary situation in the middle of the woods but thankfully her amazing teammates and another veteran team (Storm - Beowulf) were passing by when it happened. Everyone worked together

to get her off the course to safety. Just another reminder that you can never be too careful when out there especially while bushwhacking. Very thankful that Kelly was okay thanks to the other teams and race staff.

Thank you to all of the amazing volunteers out there. I know it can be a very long 24 hours plus for everyone and in some cases you get as little sleep as we do. From everyone in the race HQ (Barb, Amber, Kristen, Iris, Kris, Emil etc) to the volunteers on the course helping to keep us safe, moving and entertained (Alisha, Simpy, Jay L, Denise, Richard, Dave C, Angus, Tim, Aubrey, Wanda, Barbara/Owen Steele, Brad, Luis, the Gorillas etc) sorry if I missed anyone. And lastly Bob for giving us the only overnight Adventure Race in Ontario/Quebec. We wish we had more but we are so lucky to be able to have WT! Can't wait till your 3-4 day race...:)

<https://www.strava.com/activities/9987412028/overview>