

## Race Report Wilderness Traverse 2022 – Team Fly By Night (by Travis Murphy)

Round two of the WT was a blast! Our team had a few challenges and learned a few things but overall, we persevered. This was the second wilderness traverse adventure race for myself (Travis Murphy), Kevin Gagne and Kevin Denston. It was Courtney Lawson's first race and she absolutely killed it. If anyone needs a natural pro, give her a call.

After getting the maps at 7 am we quickly sorted out most of our navigation plans without too much challenge – leaving some of the nighttime paddling fairly generic with headings and rough distances. We were quite thorough with our measurements of the distances and bearings on the trek and bike legs, proving to be a worthwhile amount of work. The prologue trek went well and we came off that into the bikes quite quickly. We struggled to be as aggressive as we could have been on the winding singletrack and ended up meandering behind a couple of teams, particularly on the first set of ATV tracks. Once through that to the road, we pace lined our way through and managed to get the rest of the bike leg done in short order without any major navigation challenges.

Our TA onto the trek took slightly longer than planned as we changed clothes and ate our fill of TA food. Had I anticipated the heat on the Georgian rocks, I would have increased my salt intake already at that point in time (hello cramps!). On the trek we managed to make good time to TA6 despite the relentless junipers and rough shoreline. We tried to jog in open areas and to be mindful of our footing in other spots. After TA6 we made an in the moment decision to take a bearing to Grouse Lake rather than follow the shoreline to the ATV trail. At the time we worried that the trail would be hard to spot and that we would travel too far. In hindsight, our angled line cost us significant time and energy bushwacking on bearing through some especially tough terrain. I had a couple of cramps during the tough swamps and thick undergrowth but some salt and determination took care of that for the remainder of the trek. We ended about 300M east on the south shore of Grouse and had to backtrack west around the lake as well, which was another time loss. After refilling some water we set our heading for the road to CP7 and made it there without issue. On the following bushwack sections we tried to be true to our bearing so as not to waste energy and it worked out mostly okay, despite seemingly picking the most challenging route through swamps, trees, junipers and other untamed bush. Just before CP8 we came to a swamp to our east that was not on our map and got rather concerned with our location – we decided that we had been following a bearing reliably but if we wanted, we could turn a bit west and ensure we don't miss the road. We did so, but upon review of the sat images after – we were in just the right spot! The swamp was not on the topo, but was clearly on the satellite images. It cost a few minutes deliberating but we finished the trek in good spirits as the light faded.

Into the TA for the paddle we did a gear check – all passed! Except, I somehow managed to misplace (into the bottom of a fellow teammates bag) our Sport Ident. We spent some good time hunting around the canoes for it to no avail and luckily they had an extra for us. It likely cost us 20+ additional minutes at that TA, making it quite a long stop. Next time, don't misplace the SI 😊

Once on the paddle we were moving quite smoothly and felt pretty good as a team. An island dweller volunteered a light to show the way to the inlet of the river, which was quite kind! We got into the river without error and found our way alongside a couple other teams into the first of the portaging (read: canoeing) sections. Personally, I loved them! I thought they were a great challenge and quite technical – putting the slackline practice to use on those rocks! However, it took a little while for some of the team to adjust to the technicality of them. Around midnight or so, one of our team started to experience some nausea and general fatigue – never a good sign. He endeavored to push on but likely

## Race Report Wilderness Traverse 2022 – Team Fly By Night (by Travis Murphy)

was pretty energy depleted at this point already. We should have pulled in somewhere and got him fed and dry, but we didn't realize the severity of his depleted state (because he's too hardcore). After about an hour or two and a million more portages plus some pouring rain, he really started to decompensate. I noticed it was quite severe when he turned down both coffee and chicken noodle soup at CP9 (that soup was heavenly!!). Shortly after that he let us know that he thought he was getting hypothermic. He certainly looked it with his whole-body shivering -- he couldn't even undo his life jacket or take off his gloves. We rallied as a team and got him undressed, dried and dressed into warm layers with his jacket and rubbed him down for a good while. We considered calling it at that point but he wanted to press on as best he could. We managed to finish the remaining paddle and portages to the second trek leg at CP10 still in okay time around 550AM -- we did struggle to find the correct route through the creek/swamp/pond NW of CP10, though. After chatting with the TA volunteers and going over our options as a team, we opted to leave off the 7km trek and continue on the Challenge course. Our unlucky teammate had recovered enough to paddle, but would not have been able to complete the 7km trek if it resembled anything like the previous trek leg, difficulty wise. On one hand, the decision to continue on as a full team was not difficult at all -- we weren't going to leave him behind at the TA. However, we would be remiss to say that it wasn't disappointing to leave that remaining trek leg on the table when the rest of our team still felt pretty good. But, that's AR for you! Stick together as a team and it'll pay off in the long run.

Our remaining paddle leg was monotonous and felt longer than it was, especially that first portage after CP10! Once it was done we kitted up into bike gear and finished the final bike leg well, albeit a bit slower than our normal pace. All told, I think we rolled into the remote TA just before the 24-hour mark, completing the challenge course.

Our team left the 2022 WT feeling both accomplished and unsatisfied. There's lots left on the table for our team to achieve and we look forward to the 2023 edition!!

### Main Learning Points:

- Trust the navigation decisions made during the map review (if you thought it through at that time) when you are fully rested and keen. Our decision to cut to Grouse Lake from the corner near CP6 cost us a lot of time and we made several other small errors during the trek that were costly from a time perspective.
- Nutrition on the bike and the paddle may need to be swapped from pre-packaged items to liquid fuel, if only for the ease of getting it in.
- Get more sodium in early if its hot out.
- Push past teams on the MTB legs if jammed up so that you can get ahead rather than caught behind traffic jams -- but do it as a team so you aren't playing leapfrog the whole time.
- When someone is feeling like they may bonk -- get together as a team and get fuelled up and dressed for the weather in advance rather than wait and play catch-up (or have to stop altogether). Although it seems like it would be time consuming, having a team member unable to continue at racing pace will most certainly cost more time in the end.
- Be mindful of time slipping away at the TAs -- have a plan and stick to it if you want to be fast ... and don't lose the SI!

Thanks to Bob and the team of amazing other contributors for a fantastic event. It was the perfect ending to summer!